

HOW DID WINSTON S. CHURCHILL'S EXPERIENCE AS A PRISONER OF WAR  
DURING THE BOER WAR AFFECT HIS LEADERSHIP STYLE AND CAREER?

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## ABSTRACT

HOW DID WINSTON S. CHURCHILL'S EXPERIENCE AS A PRISONER OF WAR DURING THE BOER WAR AFFECT HIS LEADERSHIP STYLE AND CAREER? by MAJ Sean-Andre W. Powell, 114 pages.

This thesis will examine how Churchill's experience in the Boer War affected his career and leadership style. Initial research revealed that Churchill planned to make some major life decisions in 1899 the year he participated in The Boer War. Fate and other variables such as his financial independence and celebrity status enabled rapid realization of his goals to attain political office in the British government. Research indicated that Churchill's experience while a Boer prisoner of war (POW) and his subsequent escape proved to be an especially formative experience for him professionally. In addition, his POW experience taught him the Boer perspective of the conflict, which developed his leadership and personality. Secondary questions answered are: How did his experience as a POW affect him? What did his experiences in Cuba, India, and Sudan teach him? What were Churchill's motivations during his time in the British Army? Using a chronological approach throughout this paper will provide the reader with the most logical and easiest method of answering these questions.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

How unhappy is that poor man who loses his liberty? What can the wide world give him in exchange! No degree of material comfort, no consciousness of correct behaviour, can balance the hateful degradation of imprisonment. Before I had been an hour in captivity. . . . I resolved to escape.

— Winston S. Churchill,  
*London to Ladysmith Via Pretoria*

#### Overview

This thesis will examine how Churchill's experience in the Boer War affected his career and leadership style. Research revealed that Churchill planned to make some major life decisions the year he participated in The Boer War. Consequently, fate and other variables such as his financial independence and celebrity status enabled rapid realization of his goals to attain political office in the British government. Research also indicated that Churchill's experience while a Boer prisoner of war (POW) and his subsequent escape proved to be an especially formative experience for him both personally and professionally. Churchill's POW experience developed his leadership traits, which enhanced his professional life because Churchill later applied his knowledge of the Boer perspective to craft two constitutions. This experience allowed Churchill to see people in a different light and he was hence able to learn how to get along with all types of people. Furthermore, Churchill spent a lot of time with the Boer soldiers and therefore Churchill intimately learned both sides of the Boer War (1899-1902), whereby giving him a very unique and intimate perspective. Few people are able to learn such

diverse details about both sides of the war as Churchill did during his Boer War (1899-1902) and POW experience.

At the core of the analysis is the effect of Churchill's experiences on the following five leadership traits: bravery, optimism, candor, compassion and high energy.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Churchill's four career enablers, that he consistently used both in the military and as a journalist to win an election to Parliament, were his relationship with his father, his writing ability, his personality, and his family connections.<sup>2</sup> Both the traits and enablers formed a noticeable professional pattern that Churchill developed upon entering military service and continued throughout Churchill's early career.

Secondary questions answered are; how did his experience as a POW affect him? What were Churchill's motivations during his time in the British Army? What did his experiences in Cuba, India, and Sudan teach him? How many and what leadership positions, either political or military, did Churchill serve in before his experience in the Boer War as compared to after the Boer War? A chronological approach throughout this paper will provide the reader with the most logical and easiest method of answering these questions.

This is a thesis that aspires to examine Churchill's time in the Boer War and broaden the school of thought on how military service can affect the political leadership of a nation. Churchill's time as a Boer POW affected him deeply as a person by teaching

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<sup>1</sup>Steven F. Hayward, *Churchill on Leadership: Executive Success in the Face of Adversity* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 3, 115-117, 129, 151. I originated these leadership traits here, and they recurred and dominated throughout the research.

<sup>2</sup>Douglas S. Russell, *Winston Churchill Soldier: The Military Life of a Gentleman at War* (London: Conway, 2005), 58, 321.

him to deal with extreme adversity and enabled his first experience in political office. The nuance resides in how deeply his POW experience affected him. At the outset of the thesis, there are no solid expectations related to his POW experience that lead to one conclusion over another. This is because there are many interpretations of how Churchill both lived, and through the sum of his varied experiences, developed his leadership style. A valid assumption is that those different experiences established a unique leadership style and deep-seated motivations within his life and career, one of which was his Boer War (1899-1902) experience.

The primary sources for this paper were: (1) *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*; (2) *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, both written by Churchill himself; (3) *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume, Part 1: 1874-1896*; (4) *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume, Part 2: 1896-1900* both by his son, Randolph S. Churchill, both volumes provided correspondence between Churchill and his mother outlining his thoughts and experiences; and (5) *The Great Anglo Boer War* by Byron Farwell provided the foundation for reference on the Boer War itself.

## Chapter Two

The second chapter will provide an overview of Winston S. Churchill up to the time of his service in The Boer War (1899-1902). All of his leadership traits and career enablers mentioned on the previous page were developed prior to his traveling to South Africa. This chapter will discuss which leadership traits were already parts of Churchill's personality and which traits he slowly acquired. The background on Churchill's life until his trip to South Africa will provide the basis for his bravery, optimism, compassion, candor and high energy. The topics covered in this chapter are his family, early

education, his service in Cuba, the Indian frontier, and the Sudan. These experiences will describe how his leadership traits and career enablers developed.

### Chapter Three

The third chapter will provide the background of Churchill's capture by Boer forces in 1899 and the context for his time spent as a POW. In order to understand South Africa there will be a brief overview of the Boers and the conflicted relationship between the Boers and the British government. Appendix C provides a more detailed summary of the personalities and events that led to the 1899-1902 conflict. This chapter will briefly describe the situation both politically and militarily for the British as well as Churchill's thoughts on the conflict.

Churchill's leadership traits come together during his capture by Boer forces and his professional reputation receives national and, eventually, global recognition for his brave actions. The way in which the Boer people treated Churchill taught him important lessons in both compassion and candor. Furthermore, Churchill seems remarkable in the ability to learn so much from his experiences.

There are numerous works on the topic of the Boer War; Byron Farwell's *The Great Anglo Boer War* was the most useful source for information on the conflict. Additionally, Churchill's book *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* and *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume, Part 2 1896-1900* provided excellent depth and insight into Churchill's motivations and thoughts. Further, Roy Jenkins' *Churchill A Biography*, Churchill's *A Roving Commission: My Early Life*, Thomas Pakenham's *The Boer War*, - The Osprey Military Men-at-Arms book 301: *The Boer Wars (1) 1836-1898*, and Gregory Fremont-Barnes *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* and David

Smurthwaite's *The Boer War 1899-1902* clarified certain points of the Boer War and Churchill's activities.

#### Chapter Four

This chapter will focus on Churchill's escape as well as the controversy that grew out of his well-publicized escape. Additionally, this portion will briefly discuss Churchill's activities in South Africa and will also discuss what happened to Churchill shortly after his return to Britain. Furthermore, the text will discuss any notable shifts in Churchill's behavior, such as augmenting existing traits and enablers or establishing new patterns.

Based on the research, this thesis will conclude whether or not Churchill's professional motivations evolved and if so, to what degree. The conclusions drawn are that his POW experience did get him elected. While his POW fame enabled his election, Churchill's ability to leverage his professional enablers and leadership traits let him quickly seize the opportunity to run for election under favorable conditions.

#### Chapter Five

Chapter 5 will conclude this thesis by providing a review of the main points, which supports the argument that Churchill's time as a POW was the critical event that enabled his subsequent political successes. The concluding chapter will also take account of the post-war period to discern the short and long-term effects on Churchill from his experience in the Boer War. This portion of the text uses the information gathered to consolidate how Churchill's leadership traits and career evolved from before his capture and after his escape. This chapter will also provide a summary of how Churchill's actions

ultimately focused on politics and positions of increasing political power. Finally, the conclusion will briefly describe how his experience in the Boer War may or may not have shaped Churchill's career, culminating in the writing of the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony constitution.

### Considerations

This thesis will cover Churchill's life until 1906 with minimum reference to any of his activities after that time. Churchill was a prolific writer and a very articulate orator, therefore, his work was very popular to the public. This research was challenging because there was a vast amount of available research material. Analysis relied heavily on Churchill's memoirs. His personal memoirs could contain some biases since Churchill, indeed, wrote them himself. There are numerous primary source books written by Churchill specifically addressing his observations and experiences during the conflict that provide useful insights. Further, there are some sources written at the conclusion of the conflict that provided mainly a British view of the conflict and to a lesser extent the Boer perspectives.

While a high-volume writer, Churchill often omitted or liberally interpreted events in a favorable way for himself. Churchill's bias was understandable, as he wanted the public to perceive him in the best possible light in order to further his political ambitions. Therefore, this research required the necessity of constantly cross-referencing information from unbiased sources in order to gain an objective perspective of events.

## CHAPTER 2

### CHURCHILL'S LIFE LEADING TO 1899

Churchill's family, education, and military service served as his professional building blocks. He developed his leadership traits of bravery, optimism, compassion, candor and high energy during this period as well. Early in his life, Churchill became a driven individual who capitalized on the opportunities availed to him. When those opportunities did not exist, he stubbornly persisted until he created them. The early death of Churchill's father motivated Churchill because he was scared that he himself might not live very long. The death of Lord Randolph taught the young Winston Churchill how precious life truly was and that he needed to make the best of every situation presented to him. However, Churchill's actions led to the conclusion that his strong personality and lack of a meaningful relationship with his father led to his rapid pursuit of becoming a politician. Amazingly, Churchill was sharp enough to know how important life events and actions could shape his wants and desires both professionally and personally.

#### Family

Winston Churchill was born on 30 November 1874 at Blenheim Palace built by his ancestor, John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough.<sup>3</sup> From his birth, Churchill lived in a world of privilege and aristocracy, which grew from his family's lineage and political status within the British government. His parents, though not official aristocracy,

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<sup>3</sup>Russell, 14. The Duke of Marlborough was arguably one of, if not the greatest British generals of his era, who through his victories against French King Louis XIV in the early 1700s resulted in security for England from French hegemony on the European continent.

were successful in cultivating the perception of aristocratic grandeur. His father, Lord Randolph Churchill, had a short, but successful political career culminating as the leader of the House of Commons and the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the age of thirty-seven.<sup>4</sup> Lord Randolph was a second son, which translated into not inheriting the family title or vast properties of the Duke of Marlborough.<sup>5</sup>

The importance of understanding how Churchill's parents fit into his life directly contributed to the development of Churchill's personality and influenced his long-term political ambitions. While his family lacked money, they still had connections within the British government and the British upper class. Churchill's family was frequently in debt from their efforts to give the perception of a privileged life while not possessing the necessary wealth.<sup>6</sup> Aside from a successful career as a politician, which paid little at that time, Lord Randolph did not have alternative professional skills.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, he resigned soon after reaching his highest office as the Chancellor of the Exchequer with declining physical health, Lord Randolph Churchill, passed away in 1895 at the age of forty-five.<sup>8</sup> Lord Randolph's early departure from politics gave the Churchill family name a negative reputation, which motivated Winston Churchill to enter politics and

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Norman Rose, *Churchill The Unruly Giant* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 8.

<sup>7</sup>Russell, 15.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 15.



renew his family's reputation.<sup>9</sup> The early death of Churchill's father pushed Churchill into seeing life through the eyes of a much older individual.

It was widely believed that Lord Randolph's early demise resulted from tertiary syphilis.<sup>10</sup> This disease causes mental instability which in Lord Randolph's case, aided his political ambitions in the short term but caused his fall from political favor and preceded his decline in physical health.<sup>11</sup> Some compared Churchill's mental stability much later in his political career to the decline of his father's political career. While Churchill's sometimes impulsive, outspoken nature came across especially in politics as being mentally unstable, or unreliable, ultimately he learned to control himself enough to gain the political support necessary to remain connected to government. An early example, discussed below in chapter 2, was his decision to publish his book on the Sudan titled *The River War*, which criticized General Lord Kitchener. Kitchener worked against Churchill in his early military career and dealt with Churchill in politics until his death during World War I. Kitchener did not agree with how Churchill pursued his political ambitions through military service.

Winston Churchill's mother, Lady Randolph, was an American socialite from an extremely affluent family in New York City. She was an active member of the London social scene who helped her son immensely.<sup>12</sup> Her connections within government and

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<sup>9</sup>Winston S. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 62.

<sup>10</sup>Rose, 24.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>12</sup>Russell, 15.

high society were critical to Churchill's professional success. Churchill's family connections enabled his careers in journalism and literature to prosper because his connections were with high ranking and political military persons, such as Prime Minister Salisbury and others. Therefore, Churchill could often get whatever position he wanted through enough persistence. She also pressed her military contacts for favors to help Churchill serve in combat over other officers and sometimes against the commanding officers wishes. As a result, Churchill earned opportunities in his military career and writing profession that most did not.

As a young boy, Churchill was cared for and raised by Mrs. Elizabeth Everest, his governess.<sup>13</sup> She provided the moral base for Churchill and gave him emotional support in the vacuum of a strong relationship with his parents until he began formal schooling. Based on her role as governess in Churchill's life she also instilled in him his sense of compassion. While Churchill yearned for stronger relationships with his parents, he never achieved the closeness he wanted with them, especially with his father who passed away just before Churchill's commissioning into the Army.<sup>14</sup> Churchill took hard the lack of an emotional connection with his father, who, like many young boys; he looked up to as a positive role model. As the denial of any meaningful attention from his father accumulated in Churchill's life, a need to prove himself to his father grew.<sup>15</sup> This missing relationship guided Churchill towards a life in politics and ultimately made him want a political career even more.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>14</sup>Rose, 9.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 14.

Churchill idolized his father, but never formed a meaningful relationship with him. As a distant way to maintain any connection with Lord Randolph, Churchill read many of his father's speeches and all the newspaper articles following his father's political activities in the local paper.<sup>16</sup> This desire to connect with his father through being able to discuss current events at a young age helped mold Churchill into a prolific writer.

Therefore, Churchill's family connections and upbringing pushed him into politics. The results of Churchill's family upbringing were his lack of a relationship with his father driving him towards politics, as well as the expected use of family connections to help Churchill's career. He developed his leadership trait of compassion through his relationship with his governess because he never had a true close connection with his father. Churchill carried this compassion with him into adulthood.

### Early Education

The young Churchill seemed quite capable, loved to read books, had a strong memory and intellect, but his parents and governess gave him very little discipline and his affluent lifestyle spoiled him. The two qualities that often repaired his grades in school and served him exceedingly well throughout his life were his high energy, and phenomenal mind.<sup>17</sup> His parents' distant relationship with Churchill caused them to decide that providing their children a high quality of life was a substitute for having a close relationship with them. Consequently, from his relaxed upbringing, Churchill

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<sup>16</sup>Russell, 19.

<sup>17</sup>Rose, 12.

labored hard during his early academic years due to his uneven performance and adventurous personality.

That while a high energy and active boy, he was physically small and lacked stamina for intense sports. While Churchill acquired his compassion from his governess, he developed his optimism from being physically smaller than most of the other boys his age. Churchill still kept up with other boys his age and that in return made him optimistic that he could still set out to do everything his heart desired. As Churchill progressed through school, it was apparent to teachers that he possessed innate intelligence, was a prolific reader, had an excellent memory, but only occasionally excelled in school.<sup>18</sup> Before Churchill attended the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, his academic performance was spotty at best. Churchill excelled in subjects that interested him and received poor grades at those that he did not prefer.<sup>19</sup>

Churchill had to work very hard for entrance into the Royal Military College at Sandhurst passing the entrance exam on his third attempt. The decision for Churchill to go to Sandhurst originated from his father's observance of his son constantly playing with his large collection of toy soldiers, and the enjoyment it provided.<sup>20</sup> His father's decision to put Churchill in Sandhurst was probably due to Churchill's love of military things, high spirit of adventure, and inconsistent academic performance.

Before Sandhurst released the exam results, Lord Randolph used his political connections to obtain a preferred position in a prestigious regiment for Churchill before

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<sup>18</sup>Russell, 20.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 26.

he started school.<sup>21</sup> Despite receiving a Cavalry cadetship, Sandhurst admitted Churchill as an Infantry cadet because those ahead of him on the admissions list chose not to attend. Churchill considered, briefly, attending a formal university later in life when deciding how to best pursue his political career; however, the prospect of taking further entrance exams dissuaded him.<sup>22</sup>

A pattern emerged in Churchill's life that whatever he did, called attention to himself. Even at a young age, he wanted to build his reputation. Churchill reasoned that if he did the usual things, he would only be an average person.<sup>23</sup> For instance, the Cavalry attracted Churchill because of the more elaborate uniforms, sabre and use of horses, which he perceived as better than the more basic Infantry culture. He learned the value of having a high reputation from the rapid political success of his late father and the effects of not having a positive reputation. Therefore, Churchill knew from the start that he needed to build upon his reputation.

Churchill developed these internalized ideas of following his father into politics at a very early age; however, Churchill realized that he would need to establish himself in order to improve his chances of winning an election. Churchill's high-energy personality would not permit him to proceed slowly. Some biographers such as Norman Rose believed that Churchill saw how his father fell ill at such a young age in the prime of his life and wanted to make the most of becoming a politician before anything similar

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>22</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 202-203.

<sup>23</sup>Rose, 32.

happened to him. Instead of a shortened life, Churchill's ambition and adventurous personality ironically drove him to take extreme risks on many occasions.

Based on his distant relationship with his father, Churchill's desire to become a politician grew. He wanted to earn his father's respect as well as have a common ground for them to have a relationship and prove his worth. Churchill idolized his father and in a perfect world, both he and Lord Randolph would serve in parliament together working to make England a better country. Despite his challenging education at Sandhurst and Churchill's previous academic and physical deficiencies, he thrived and graduated in 1895, ranking 20th out of 130 cadets.<sup>24</sup> This success furthered Churchill's optimism and gave him more desire to succeed in the political realm.

This performance at Sandhurst set the tone for Churchill's professional life. He focused intensely upon whatever he needed to accomplish. At Sandhurst, he learned military tactics, fortifications, and other military subjects that interested him. For the first time, Churchill received formal leadership training which enabled him to take charge. Churchill's training time in the British Army enabled his desire to be in charge; but ironically, since he could not always be in charge, Churchill decided against being a career officer. Unfortunately, overshadowing his personal and academic success at Sandhurst was the death of his father, who passed away from his illness just before graduation. The death of Lord Randolph, while traumatic, eliminated his father's influence and allowed Churchill to make his own life decisions without the often-

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 34.

disparaging judgment of his father.<sup>25</sup> A contributing factor allowing Churchill to take numerous chances with his life during his military career and campaigns.

After Sandhurst, at the age of twenty-one, Churchill arranged to become a Cavalry officer assigned to the fourth Hussars Regiment under the Regimental Commander, Colonel Brabazon, also a longtime family acquaintance.<sup>26</sup> Churchill's independent decision to accept a Cavalry commission and join the fourth Hussars was a reversal from the original arrangement established through Churchill's late father. Lord Randolph thought it best for Churchill's career to be in the 60th Rifles Regiment based on the unit's high reputation. Churchill's stubbornness and preference for the Cavalry overrode his father's arrangement.

Churchill decided after six months that the military was not a career for him, but rather a stepping-stone for a future in politics.<sup>27</sup> Upon Lord Randolph's death, the politician in Churchill started to emerge, first by changing to the Cavalry arranged through his own connections. Churchill realized soon after serving in the army that he wanted out, but resolved to adapt and creatively use his time in the military to build his own reputation for credibility for a later career in politics. Churchill's imaginative creativity was essential to his being able to find opportunities and then use his energy and persistence to make them a reality. Although Churchill's military experiences may have propelled him into politics, it is evident by the decisions Churchill made early in his

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<sup>25</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 62.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 61-62.

<sup>27</sup>Russell, 102.

military career that he had a plan and dream to become a politician all along. Churchill was wise in his decisions to use his military career to his advantage.

Upon Churchill's arrival to the 4th Hussars in 1895, the Regimental Commander divided the garrison military year into a seven-month summer season of training and a five-month winter season of leave.<sup>28</sup> This five-month period of leave, was Churchill's first opportunity to look for something to further his career without expending his meager funds. It worked out that military members were granted a continuous two-and-a-half months of leave.<sup>29</sup>

Churchill wasted no time in setting the conditions to build his reputation and continue his practice of full commitment to whatever he focused on. While on leave, the usual routine for most military officers with the financial resources was polo or hunting. Both of these activities provided professional development through horsemanship or marksmanship. However, Churchill, in typical fashion, did not have the finances to support either polo or hunting activities that early in his career. Thus, Churchill decided to look towards professional development.

Churchill's early education revealed his high energy and optimism, which he carried throughout his life. Additionally, Churchill learned compassion from his governess and optimism at school. While in Sandhurst, he performed very well despite being physically small, making him feel confident. After the death of his father, it was the first chance for Churchill to use his own connections to transfer into the Cavalry to further his career. Moreover, one can conclude that Churchill's innate wit and ability to

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<sup>28</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 75.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.



see things at a young age, through the eyes of a more seasoned man than his actual age, played a role in explaining why Churchill propelled himself into the political realm. After the death of his father, he no longer needed to lead his life to improve upon the father-son relationship and Churchill felt free to make his own decisions as he saw fit. In the end, Churchill knew he wanted a career in politics, whether or not he got there through his own innate abilities, his military experience, the Boer War (1899-1902), and prisoner of war (POW) experiences or a combination of his abilities, accomplishments, and experiences is truly the question.

### Cuba

Churchill was determined, after a brief inquiry into what opportunities existed, to travel to Cuba during the Cuban War for Independence (1895-1898).<sup>30</sup> Cuba was Churchill's first adventure to test him under fire as well as work as a war correspondent. While in Cuba, he often reflected how wonderful it was to be out experiencing a real conflict as a newly commissioned officer. As a war correspondent, Churchill received a small monthly salary to write on the Cuban conflict for *The Daily Graphic*, a newspaper in London.<sup>31</sup>

His employment as a journalist was a credit to his numerous family connections as well as Churchill's confidence in his writing ability. Again, at a very young age, Churchill felt the need to read everything his father ever wrote, which most definitely shaped Churchill into a great writer. Further, this was the first of many times where he

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>31</sup>Russell, 108

found dual employment as both a military officer and a journalist. His decision to work as a war correspondent came from the necessity to earn money. His meager salary and allowance from his mother were not enough for Churchill's lifestyle and Churchill likely felt the need to help his mother keep up with her lavish lifestyle.

The persistent guerilla war in Cuba presented an affordable way for Churchill to test himself, establish a reputation, and seek out adventure. His superiors regarded Churchill's trip to Cuba as a good chance for professional development. Churchill's superiors also viewed his trip as a way to provide British military observers to the conflict.<sup>32</sup> Churchill and Reginald Barnes, a fellow Cavalry officer, arrived in Cuba and quickly integrated themselves within the Spanish formation.<sup>33</sup>

They met with the commander of the Spanish forces who handed them off to one of his staff officers, a Lieutenant Juan O'Donnell.<sup>34</sup> When Churchill and O'Donnell discussed the prospects of experiencing any combat, Lieutenant O'Donnell recommended joining a mobile column of infantry soldiers travelling between cities.<sup>35</sup> When told they had just missed one, Churchill and Barnes wanted to depart immediately and catch up since the column was on foot and they were on horseback. The explanation Churchill received from O'Donnell was that, "the enemy were everywhere and nowhere," and while "fifty horsemen can go where they please-two cannot go anywhere."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>33</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 76-78.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

Apparently, after reflection, Churchill agreed to intercept the mobile column by traveling via railroad to the column's final destination.<sup>37</sup> Throughout his life, Churchill made decisions based upon his own initial instincts or impulse. Churchill also had a circumspect side to his decisions, which he used in order to analyze the best course of action for any given event. While Churchill wanted to experience as much action as possible, O'Donnell's insights into the conflict provided the assessment he needed to realize that this guerilla style conflict did not reward an unprepared traveller, especially a representative from another imperial power.

This conversation with O'Donnell provided an early insight into Churchill's circumspect nature. Churchill was not always impulsive; rather he thought things out and considered every detail. The importance of this particular situation so early in his professional life was that since there was a war happening around him, his poor decisions could result in his death only months after graduation from Sandhurst. Again, Churchill did not want to die but rather engage in experiences that would ultimately help his professional career. Churchill knew that he needed to think things out and plan his military engagements and journalistic opportunities with detail and control. His objective analytical abilities, which led him to a decision from traveling down the road in Cuba, came from his early situational understanding. Churchill qualified those abilities as ~~the~~ "true comprehension" of the sum of various constantly changing factors from the disposition of enemy forces, their morale, their country's leadership combined with the culture, weather, infrastructure and at the root was politics.<sup>38</sup> Churchill believed that to

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Hayward, 15.

understand the sum of all these variables was military genius, a contemporary parallel within the U.S. Army would be having situational understanding.<sup>39</sup> For Churchill to realize all of this at such an early age was a remarkable undertaking.

Churchill's first time under fire occurred at the battle of La Reforma on 2 December 1895 when Spanish government forces engaged Cuban rebels continuously until driving the rebels off their position.<sup>40</sup> During the engagement, Churchill and Barnes accompanied the Spanish General Marshall Martinez Campos throughout his battlefield circulation.<sup>41</sup> They observed how the Spanish infantry drove the rebels away, but then did not pursue them into the jungle. Churchill's understanding, shortly afterwards, was that the Spanish forces never wanted to be away from a secure area at night and especially in the jungle.<sup>42</sup> During this time, Churchill learned that he was more exhilarated to be under fire than afraid of being injured.

As a journalist and despite Churchill's youth and inexperience, the news articles he wrote enabled him to develop his skills of political analysis. He correctly assessed the motivations and center of gravity of the Cuban rebel forces as well as the deficiencies of tactics and attitudes of the Spanish forces. Churchill believed that for the Spanish to march for days, then fight for hours, win the battle, but then not pursue the beaten rebels

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<sup>39</sup>Department of the Army. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 6-13. According to the U.S Army Field Manual 3-0, C1, situational understanding is the product of applying analysis and judgment to relevant information to determine the relationships among the mission variables to facilitate decision-making.

<sup>40</sup>Russell, 123-125.

<sup>41</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 76.

<sup>42</sup>Russell, 121.

was wasteful. He correctly calculated that the commitment in labor and finances justified a more aggressive strategy. Again, this development of military tactics understanding and detection is remarkable for such a young military officer of this time.

Churchill concluded that while he respected the Spanish forces for their stamina and bravery, he correctly predicted that the rebels would ultimately defeat Spain and gain their independence. Churchill already grasped the shortcomings of the Spanish strategy and differentiated between the short-term tactical victory at La Reforma and the deeper implications of flawed long-term strategy of not pursuing the rebels for total victory. Churchill interpreted the details of what he saw and incorporated them into the big picture correctly. This was a skill, which he continued to develop throughout his life, and played a crucial role in his political successes. His writing of news articles, which translated his observations providing his interpretation of events, was a tool to sharpen his critical thinking as well as his political analysis. Therefore, this experience proved to be a valuable learning tool that Churchill carried with him into politics. The way in which Churchill interpreted his experiences and put them to good use for himself was truly indicative of a leader.

Soon after the Battle of La Reforma, Churchill and Barnes returned to their regiment in England to await their unit's departure to India. The Spanish government awarded both Churchill and Barnes two awards each based on their service in Cuba. The two awards were the Cross of the Order of Military Merit First Class with Red Ribbon, the red signified wartime service, and many years later, they both received the Cuban

Campaign Medal.<sup>43</sup> While there is no record that Churchill provided a formal report of his activities in Cuba for the British military upon his return, he did capture his observations and political analysis in his news articles, which received positive reviews.<sup>44</sup>

According to Churchill, he achieved his professional development goals for the trip by observing a real conflict, by having an adventure, and by partially funding the trip through journalistic work. In Churchill's eyes, the Cuba trip was, overall, a great success. He was pleased with his accomplishments and looked forward to the next opportunity for both adventure and glory when and wherever it arose. He was extremely motivated at this point to pursue the construction of his reputation in earnest. Churchill also found that his newspaper articles were well received by the public and he realized the earning potential from his writing skills and creativity. Churchill gained a newfound confidence.

Churchill's trip to Cuba, therefore, developed him both as a military planner and as a great writer. Churchill gained confidence in his writing and political analysis abilities. Churchill's trip to Cuba demonstrated his bravery under fire, and started his writing career as a journalist. While in this capacity, he developed his writing skills as well as expressed his independent mind through candid news articles providing political analysis of what he observed for the first time. This Cuban experience proved to be of much value to Churchill's later career as a military soldier, journalist, and politician.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>44</sup>Russell, 133.

### India and the Frontier Wars

After Churchill returned to England, his regiment deployed to India in 1896 where his unit settled into its garrison area on the outskirts of Bangalore, India. He described his early time in India spent on polo and reading, until the activation of the Malakand Field Force, when Churchill focused on assignment to the force.<sup>45</sup> The Malakand Field Force's mission was to quell the rebellious Pathan tribesmen on the Indian frontier.<sup>46</sup>

Again his versatility in assuming the role of a war correspondent proved its financial worth when the newly appointed Malakand Field Force Commander, General Sir Bindon Blood, sent Churchill a brief telegraphed response to his request to join the force, —very difficult; no vacancies; come up as a correspondent; will try to fit you in. B.B.”<sup>47</sup> Through various channels within his command and with much persistence, the British Army assigned Winston Churchill to the force and he headed alone from Bangalore towards the Malakand Pass in west India.

Churchill's relationship with Sir Bindon Blood began through family connections just prior to Churchill's regiment travelling to India. Churchill made it a habit, even at the young age of twenty-one, to meet and cultivate relationships with as many influential people as possible both in the military and politics. Churchill, in a calculating manner, never missed an opportunity to advance his career and, in the case of Blood, secured a

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<sup>45</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 122.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 123. The initials B.B. were short for Bindon Blood.

verbal promise of including Churchill in any expedition Blood commanded.<sup>48</sup> Churchill made his final coordination with his unit, the 4th Hussars, and finalized his position as a paid war correspondent for two newspapers. Therefore, Churchill clearly illustrated political awareness through his ways of dealing with military assignments. Churchill knew how to get into the assignments he needed and wanted by talking to the right people.

In 1897, the Malakand Pass was still part of India and geographically it is located inside present day Pakistan and borders present day Afghanistan. Churchill traveled two thousand miles by train to arrive at the city of Nowshera, India and then traveled another forty miles by wagon to the Malakand Pass and the field force encampment.<sup>49</sup> Shortly after arriving, Sir Bindon Blood assigned him as an extra aide de camp.<sup>50</sup> This was an extra officer on Blood's staff, which gave him minimal responsibility and allowed Churchill flexibility to move around in order to have material for his news articles. While serving as an aide-de-camp Churchill learned how Sir Bindon Blood would alternate between political negotiation with the enemy tribes and fighting them as the situation dictated. This was a great political learning experience for Churchill. Churchill developed a strong respect for how Blood led the force, which showed in his book *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*.<sup>51</sup> Churchill arrived with similar goals for this experience as in

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 123, 125.

<sup>50</sup>Russell, 164.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 163.



Cuba: to be where the action occurred, to write about it, and to build his reputation.

Indeed the experience was adventurous, violent, and tested Churchill.

Since Churchill was there from the good favor of the commander, he remained near Sir Bindon Blood. After a night when the indigenous population of the Mohmand Valley harassed their encampment with rifle fire, Blood, as the commander of the three brigades, which made up the force, ordered the second brigade to pacify the valley in retaliation.<sup>52</sup>

At the prospect of seeing action, the young Winston Churchill joined the second brigade and took part in the efforts to pacify the valley.<sup>53</sup> He preferred the adventure of combat to the relative safety of remaining near the commander. This experience continued a pattern started in Cuba of seeking combat, which revealed that Churchill hated the routine and regimen of remaining fixed whether to a military unit or political party. He was an energetic, restless personality who was happiest in moving between units as he saw fit in order to be a part of whatever the action would build his reputation through active combat. The tools Churchill employed in these scenarios to gain freedom of movement were his persuasive abilities and his charisma which allowed him to position himself to receive the most personal and professional benefit in the form of medals or material for his writings.

On 16 September 1897, the second brigade moved into the Mohmand Valley to punish the local tribes for attacking their camp.<sup>54</sup> After entering the valley, the brigade

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<sup>52</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 136.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>54</sup>Russell, 166.

divided forces in order to cover more ground. The local tribesmen soon ambushed an Infantry company that Churchill joined earlier that day for the operation.

The ensuing battle was particularly violent and he described one event during the attack where many were shot including witnessing the battalion adjutant brutally killed by a sword wielding attacker in front of him.<sup>55</sup> This event and the brutality of the scene was a true test of Churchill's courage and resilience. However, he continued to display the personal courage and self-confidence that Churchill relied upon to get him through difficult times. While his bravery stemmed from his personality, perhaps Churchill's bravery grew from the desire to restore his family reputation. Churchill did not want to dishonor his family name as his father had at the end of his political career.

He reflected after several hard engagements that, —“i my novel I develop the idea that a ‘politician’ very often possesses mere physical courage. Military opinion is of course the contrary. But at any rate whatever I do afterwards, no one can say anything against me on this score.”<sup>56</sup> After the violent battles in the Mohmand Valley, which cost the second brigade several officers and soldiers during the vicious fighting, the chain of command attached Churchill to the 31st Punjab Infantry Regiment as a company commander.<sup>57</sup> Prior to joining the Malakand Field Force, Churchill began writing a

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<sup>55</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 141.

<sup>56</sup>Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1967), 793.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 797.

fiction book called *Savrola*, which he acknowledged, was not very good, but started his book writing.<sup>58</sup>

As a professional young officer, he strived to accomplish his jobs very well, whatever they were, especially if he were in charge. In the case of the 31st Punjab Infantry, he was the company commander of Indian troops. While serving as a company commander, Churchill enjoyed leading this company of Indian soldiers.<sup>59</sup> Despite not speaking their language, he overcame this obstacle through leading by example, learning a few important phrases in their native language and always smiling. He led them in three or four skirmishes successfully and developed a respect for his Indian soldiers.<sup>60</sup>

His peers recognized that he was fearless in battle, but through Churchill's candid talks, they also recognized his ambitions for recognition.<sup>61</sup> Churchill seemed to enjoy the moments of combat during these battles and used the experience to test himself, which strengthened his resolve to become a politician. Additionally, Churchill's need for the public to recognize him may have come from his inability to receive attention from his father. Whatever the case, Churchill had improved upon professional reputation and his leadership traits of bravery, optimism, candor, and compassion.

Unfortunately, Churchill did not receive an award for his performance in the Malakand Field Force where he performed bravely, engaging enemy tribesman as well as rescuing fellow officers and soldiers. He did receive a campaign medal, the India Medal

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<sup>58</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 154.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup>Russell, 172.

1895, for his service as an aide-de-camp to General Bindon Blood.<sup>62</sup> In addition to the two medals from the Spanish government, this first medal from the British Army reconfirmed Churchill's desire to seek adventure and opportunity to build his reputation as an officer for later use in politics.

He returned to Bangalore about seven weeks after departing for the Malakand Field Force. He reflected in a letter to his mother, –since last I wrote I have seen two (or) three sharp skirmishes and have now been 10 complete times under fire. Quite a foundation for a political life.”<sup>63</sup> Churchill continued to stoke his political ambitions and further developed his writing ability. The political analysis in Churchill's articles improved and furthered his reputation outside of the military.

An example of his developing political analysis was in a letter to his mother that described his perception of the campaign in the Indian Frontier area. In it, he outlined his disapproval of The Forward Policy, which aimed to secure the British Empire by keeping Afghanistan to the west of the Hindu Kush as a buffer to Russia.<sup>64</sup> Churchill thought the conflict at Indian frontier would only end with the annexation of Afghanistan to the point of having a clear regulated border with Russia instead of a buffer state.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>63</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 804.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 807-808.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

In March 1898, Churchill managed to join the new Tirah Expeditionary Force formed to pacify a region west of Peshewar.<sup>66</sup> This is an example of how Churchill used his optimism and connections with a bit of luck to gain assignment to the Tirah Expedition Force. Churchill's goal was to build his reputation for later use in politics. He did this through service in yet another colonial conflict. In quite a gamble, Churchill had three days of leave meant for travel back home to Bangalore from a polo tournament. Instead, Churchill travelled thirty-six hours to the Tirah Expedition Force headquarters at the Indian Frontier, knowing that if he did not secure a position, the Army would punish him for returning late to his garrison.<sup>67</sup>

Consistently leveraging his various connections, Churchill discussed his intentions with, Colonel Sir Ian Hamilton who encouraged Churchill to make contact with the commander's aide-de-camp who could influence Churchill's chances of joining the force.<sup>68</sup> Fortunately, luck played in his favor and Churchill's informal interview with the commander's aide-de-camp, Captain Haldane went well. Haldane, though junior in rank on the staff, possessed great influence with Sir William Lockhart, the commander of the Tirah Expedition Force. Lockhart granted Churchill an appointment that day and he became a member of the staff where he served as an extra orderly officer for the commander.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Russell, 181.

<sup>67</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 156-158.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.,157-158.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 158.

While he saw little action in this position, Churchill spent his time networking amongst the staff and observing Lockhart's actions. Then in April 1898, Churchill returned to Bangalore and his home garrison after the British and the frontier tribes reached a lasting peace agreement for the region. His resourceful and self-promoting nature motivated him to make the most of his time on his second and last tour on the Indian frontier.

Soon after his return to Bangalore, Churchill wrote a letter to his mother that was quite direct and provided insight into his future in the army and continued political ambitions. He initially complained of his name not being on the byline for the articles he produced for *The Daily Telegraph* while on the frontier. Churchill absolutely wanted credit for the news correspondence he provided, especially since his articles were well received by the British public. Churchill hoped his articles would add to a future political career.<sup>70</sup> In the same letter, he outlined his requirements for compensation from the newspaper as well as future plans to write his first successful book *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*.<sup>71</sup> While he spent his money freely, Churchill took his earnings seriously and always desired to maximize the payments from his work as a correspondent, which were a critical financial supplement to both him and his mother. He had a close relationship with his mother despite their distant relationship when he was younger.

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<sup>70</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 811-812.

<sup>71</sup>*The Malakand Field Force* was an account largely based on Churchill's articles to the newspapers in England and India, which provided his observations and experiences. While *Savrola* was unprofitable, *The Malakand Field Force* was his first profitable book.

Overall Churchill's experiences in India and the Frontier Wars further developed him as a soldier, writer, and person. Churchill ultimately improved upon his leadership traits that are pertinent to all good politicians. He took chances that could have ended his military career, but they propelled his reputation forward. Churchill learned how to make use of military connections, he learned how to be brave during battle, and he learned the importance of relationships and networking. Further, he displayed candor and confidence in front of his peers. Although Churchill may not have realized it at the time, his time in India was well worth the effort.

### The Nile Campaign to the Sudan

During this episode of Churchill's early career, he had to work for two years in order to gain assignment to the force sent from Egypt to re-conquer the Sudan from the Dervish inhabitants. The British military knew about Churchill's political ambition, which displeased many and caused a delay in Churchill gaining the necessary permission for assignment to the force. The main obstacle Churchill experienced was the perception, by senior officers, that he was a medal-hunter and shameless self-promoter.<sup>72</sup> However, Churchill's optimism and high energy maintained his internal commitment towards getting to the Sudan. Churchill had a great ability for setting aside what other people thought of him and not allowing it to get him down. All of his effort was towards building his reputation to the level that he could win an election to parliament. Churchill gambled that in the end, the people would judge his accomplishments and see his abilities as a political leader regardless of what the British military thought of him.

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<sup>72</sup>Russell, 188.

His consistent desire to serve in combat, first in Cuba, then on the Indian frontier and now in Sudan placed him in the position to receive both recognition and medals for service and bravery. The Sudan campaign was larger in both size and scope than any of Churchill's other previous combat actions. Before his pivotal experience in South Africa, Churchill already had in his mind that soon he would leave the Army and would need to have received the highest reputation possible from his military service. He hoped that his service in the Sudan would provide his highest military achievement enabling him to successfully transition into politics.

In a letter home, Churchill requested that his mother leverage her royal contacts in order to gain favor for Churchill to transfer to a different unit headed for service in Egypt and the Sudan. —Must now go to Egypt and you should write to Kitchener on the subject. . . . All I want is to be sure of going next March or so before the autumn campaign. It is Khartoum next year.”<sup>73</sup> Churchill believed that he deserved to be part of every military action that could grant him both experience and credibility for a political career. Churchill was innately focused in finding a way to meet his career goal of becoming a politician.

His manipulations to serve in combat benefited his reputation, but Churchill's candid talk of his ambitions left both higher-ranking officers and peers feeling that Churchill was a self-promoter who did not conform to the commander's ideals. On one level, he was obviously working towards his own improvement; however, with his father gone and his family perpetually in debt he knew he had to work quickly and aggressively

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<sup>73</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 813.



towards his goal at the cost of some negative opinions. Regarding his non-conformist behavior, later in his political life, Churchill sought to define his political position, which entailed drastic sometimes radical changes, which will be touched upon in chapter 4.

The overall tone of the letter revealed Churchill's growing ego and destiny to accomplish great things in the world.<sup>74</sup> Churchill stubbornly continued efforts to gain an appointment to the force headed to Egypt and Sudan without success. It appeared the Egyptian Army Commander, General Sir Horatio Kitchener, consistently disapproved his numerous requests.<sup>75</sup> Kitchener sensed that Churchill was not trying to become part of the campaign to help the Empire or as part of a long-term career; instead Churchill was an immature, self-promoter whose main intent was seeking medals. In this assessment, Kitchener was correct when taking Churchill's conduct at face value. However, Churchill did want to help the Empire. He considered all of his military experience to be of value later as a politician, but not everyone understood this, or if they did, they did not agree with Churchill.

In the meantime, Churchill finally completed the manuscript for *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* in December 1897 in order to be the first to publish ahead of Lord Fincastle who won the Victoria Cross and whose book covered much the same topic.<sup>76</sup> Churchill's efforts paid off and he published his book ahead of Fincastle and subsequently received several positive reviews by many people in positions of great military and political power. While on leave in London, Churchill received a request

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Russell, 189.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid, 178-179.

from the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, to meet and discuss *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*. As they discussed Churchill's book, Lord Salisbury desired to develop a better picture of what happened on the frontier away from politically charged speeches.<sup>77</sup>

At the conclusion of their meeting he told Churchill, —hope you will allow me to say how much you remind me of your father, with whom such important days of my political life were lived. If there is anything at any time that I can do which would be of assistance to you, pray do not fail to let me know.”<sup>78</sup> Of course, Churchill did not let this opportunity pass and he requested to join the Sudan Campaign. Churchill's meeting with the Prime Minister was another example of how well connected Churchill's family was and how large his reputation had become outside of the military from his writing ability. Churchill had now established a connection to the Prime Minister who worked on Churchill's behalf to gain assignment to Egypt.

The Prime Minister sent a telegram requesting that the Army add Churchill to the Sudan campaign and again Kitchener gave this request a negative response.<sup>79</sup> However, this time Churchill used the government bureaucracy to his advantage. After receiving word that Sir Evelyn Wood, the Adjutant General, was displeased with Kitchener's personnel selection methods, Churchill used a well-placed family friend who told the Adjutant General about Churchill's situation.<sup>80</sup> At this point, Churchill decided to use all

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<sup>77</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 164.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

available means to gain assignment to the force headed to Sudan, which in this case were numerous powerful connections within the government.

Two days later, the War Office provided the order to Churchill that, “You have been attached as a supernumerary Lieutenant To the 21st Lancers for the Sudan Campaign.”<sup>81</sup> Again, Churchill heavily leveraged his family connections by obtaining the military post he sought through contacts, despite denial by the commander and other military bureaucrats. Churchill’s optimism that things would work out in the end caused him to persevere despite the numerous negative responses and passage of two years. As luck would have it, the Army granted Churchill’s wish and he arrived just in time for the major combat phase of the campaign.

At twenty-four years old, Churchill arrived in Cairo at the beginning of August 1898, almost two years after he began his efforts to join the Sudan Campaign to his third conflict.<sup>82</sup> In keeping with his previous adventures, Churchill was a paid war correspondent for a newspaper. Now into his fourth tour in a war zone, after the Tirah Field Force, Churchill’s professional pattern was set. He gained assignment to the unit seeing combat of some sort and arranged to be a war correspondent. Then after he departed the operation, Churchill wrote a book on his experience. The Nile Campaign, as it was known, had moved into the fourth phase, where the British-Egyptian Force was to move on the Dervish capital of Omdurman.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 167.

<sup>82</sup>Russell, 191.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 192, 198. For context, the Sudan Campaign consisted of five phases of which Churchill participated in the fourth phase only. Phase 1 was the reconstitution of the Egyptian Army between 1883 and 1896. Phase 2 finished September 1896 and was

During this tour, Churchill had another extremely close call, which could have almost ended his life but tested Churchill's personal audacity again. After Churchill's unit waited out the initial fighting, the unit chain of command ordered Churchill's regiment, the 21st Lancers, south towards their objective, the city of Omdurman. His unit's task was reconnaissance to determine what enemy forces stood between the main British-Egyptian forces and Omdurman. If the 21st Lancers located the enemy, they were to drive the Dervishes off in preparation for the advance of the main British-Egyptian force.

Things started slowly as the column of Cavalry moved from the safety of the British defensive position from which a number of Dervish infantry were eventually located. Initially, it appeared to be a force of approximately 150 Dervishes, but turned out to be an estimated 2,600 against the 440 British Lancers.<sup>84</sup> The Dervishes arrayed themselves in a sunken ravine and the 21st Lancers did not grasp the severity of the situation until they were upon Dervish lines, refer to figure 1. The close combat was intense with the 21st Lancers losing five officers, sixty-five men killed or wounded and 120 horses.<sup>85</sup> Churchill decided to carry a Mauser automatic pistol as his primary weapon instead of a sword after injuring his shoulder in India. His decision to use a pistol proved

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the recapture of the Sudanese province of Dongola, which bordered the southern edge of Egypt. Phase 3 consolidated gains in Dongola as well as built the Sudan Military Railroad, which was critical to movement of materiel and personnel. Phase 4 was the capture of the Dervish capital, Omdurman. Phase 5 was the capture of the Dervish leader Khalifa and mopping up operations, which lasted approximately one year.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>85</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 194.

invaluable as he bravely killed at least three Dervish attackers in close combat, likely saving his life.<sup>86</sup>

Churchill recognized the antiquated manner in which the Sudan conflict unfolded, noting, —ancient and modern confronted one another. The weapons, methods and the fanaticism of the Middle Ages were brought by an extraordinary anachronism into dire collision with the organization and inventions of the nineteenth century.”<sup>87</sup> For his part, Churchill fought bravely and did his job well during the battle.

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 186.

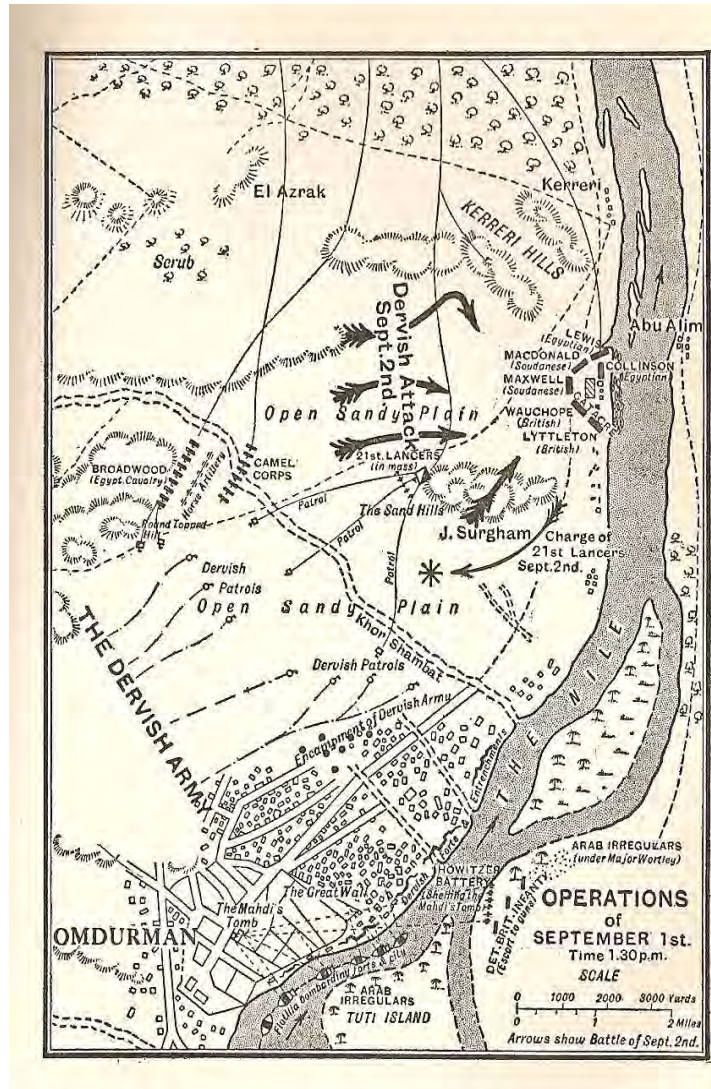


Figure 1. Map of actions 1 September 1898 during the Nile Campaign  
Source: Winston S. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 195.

Despite the ill-fated charge of the 21st Lancers, the British force decisively defeated the Dervishes, and Kitchener's force returned the Sudan back to British control. While Churchill did not like Kitchener, he learned the value of detailed planning. There was no doubt that the measured planning on the part of Kitchener and inadequate strategy on the part of the much larger Dervish force enabled a decisive victory. It was during this

campaign that Churchill gained a great appreciation for how deliberate logistical preparations greatly enabled such a total success. Churchill paid special attention to how critical the combined use of the Nile River and construction of a railroad system to transport Kitchener's forces and supplies quickly to their objectives.<sup>88</sup>

After the success of regaining control of Khartoum and destroying the Dervish Army, Churchill's unit, the 21st Lancers returned to Cairo shortly after major conflict ended. At some point during his departure from Egypt, Churchill reflected upon his successful service in the Sudan Campaign and the financial security his writing had provided him. Churchill's successes both in battle and in providing well-received news articles built Churchill's confidence, enabled him to plan his exit from the British Army, helped Churchill complete his next book on the Sudan conflict, and ultimately empowered Churchill to gain access to Parliament.<sup>89</sup> Churchill facilitated his final goal to gain a seat in Parliament shortly after his time in South Africa.

At this point in his military service, Churchill had established his reputation in British military circles in the least as an overly ambitious young officer and in the worst as a self-promoting medal hunter. On the positive side, his bravery in combat was well known and his take-charge decisive nature gained the respect of field commanders. He had published one book successfully and, through his news articles, he developed a candid and sometimes brusque way of communicating his thoughts. This often caused criticism, especially when the observations written in his frequent articles were not complimentary to the British military or British government. Churchill especially had a

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<sup>88</sup>Russell, 195.

<sup>89</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 199.

lasting dislike for General Kitchener whom he had to deal with on various occasions later in life. However, the British people were now noticing Churchill and it did not matter whether it was for good reasons or bad.

After departing Egypt, and the 21st Lancers, Churchill spent a few weeks of leave in England where he reconnected with his family while laying the initial groundwork for political office with the Conservative Party. Churchill submitted his resignation from the British Army in January 1899 while on leave in England.<sup>90</sup> Churchill then returned to India to serve his remaining time until his resignation took effect. He concluded his final affairs on a high note and departed India for good in March 1899 with his resignation effective on 3 May 1899.<sup>91</sup>

During the return trip to England, he spent some weeks in Egypt where he interviewed former colleagues for his next book, *The River War*. Churchill required further background for his book on the Sudan Campaign and needed to speak with members of the campaign staffs that the British had still assigned in Cairo. He then returned to England and continued to work on the book while learning the political scene. Based on his recent successful action in the Sudan he likely thought that he would soon be ready to run for office after a deliberate investigation of the political atmosphere. Churchill believed his reputation was strong after his performance in the Sudan and he was ready to try for political office; however, he needed to learn the political landscape.

In effect, Churchill wanted his experience in the Sudan to provide the fame he received from his Boer War (1899-1902) experience. However, Churchill misjudged the

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<sup>90</sup>Russell, 243.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 244-245.



time he had to prepare for his political debut and the Sudan conflict lacked the popular support at home compared to The Boer War (1899-1902). He wanted to have months to cultivate political contacts and learn more about current political issues, but instead only had weeks. Although Churchill had great leadership traits, military experiences, family connections, and writing abilities, he still needed his experience in the Boer war to popularize him for a seat in the political realm.

Through an unusual stroke of bad luck, Churchill's foremost political connection, and mentor, Robert Ascroft, unexpectedly died, and the twenty-five year old Churchill entered his first election.<sup>92</sup> The predictions for the July 1899 election were against Churchill from the start.<sup>93</sup> Churchill lost the election, though he optimistically reflected upon it as more of a learning experience and assessed that he performed well overall in both public speaking and in the polls. With the election over, he focused on completing *The River War* and notwithstanding Churchill's intentions; the book's tone criticized its commander Lord Kitchener. Churchill reflected that, —being now free from military discipline, I was able to write what I thought of about Lord Kitchener without fear, favor or affection, and I certainly did so.”<sup>94</sup>

This turned out to be an unknowingly poor decision as Churchill would later serve under Kitchener while in South Africa and, later on, he would deal with Kitchener on the disastrous Dardanelles operation of World War I, which cost Churchill his job.

Churchill's open criticism of Kitchener in *The River War* was a decision, which had far-

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<sup>92</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 220.

<sup>93</sup>Russell, 245.

<sup>94</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 228.

reaching effects. Had Churchill refrained from criticizing Kitchener out of professional courtesy, Churchill could have minimized his perception as a self-promoter. Nonetheless, some people may have viewed Churchill's honesty and candor as a good quality for Parliament.

Churchill's leadership and career developed extensively from the life experience after his school years becoming an ambitious, driven individual after graduating Sandhurst and entering the Army. He improved upon his strengths and worked to minimize his weaknesses. At this point, Churchill had developed his leadership traits of courage, optimism, candor, compassion and high energy. While Churchill's high energy was always a part of his personality, he used it effectively to build his reputation, write extensively, and do his military jobs well, and often simultaneously. He established that despite being undisciplined early in life, at Sandhurst and afterwards, he committed himself to his work with success. The bad qualities were his sometimes impulsive nature and candid speaking. Churchill's candid speaking and writing led to poor relationships with peers and sometimes superiors. Some believed Churchill to be overly ambitious.

Professionally, Churchill managed to develop and leverage numerous relationships for his benefit. His father's memory provided Churchill with his goal of achieving political office after deciding not to become a career military officer. In addition, his personality evolved because of his successes as in the Sudan and failures such as barely gaining admission to Sandhurst. During this phase of his life, the most significant professional skill was Churchill's writing and speaking abilities, which were refined while he worked to minimize others' perceptions of him as a medal hunter who used his family connections to gain favored access to those in power. He achieved the

former by working for numerous newspapers during his active service and writing a book about each campaign. He minimized the latter by writing in a way to make his good fortune seem serendipitous. One significant literary misjudgment was his negative portrayal of Kitchener in his book *The River War*.

Some have indicated that his intense zeal to have the public elect him to political office and his strong work ethic resulted from his fear of an early death similar to his father. However, financial security and rebuilding his family's reputation motivated Churchill instead of a shortened life. He worked hard improving his writing skills in order to earn the means to support his mother and to a lesser extent his younger brother because his military salary was inadequate. With his departure from the Army and first failed election behind him, Churchill realized that he needed to continue building his reputation and earning money in order to reach his political goal. Churchill had a unique innate leadership personality. He did not give up and continued on his life journey with optimism. With conflict in South Africa on the horizon, Churchill quickly focused on getting himself there.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION AND CHURCHILL'S CAPTURE

This chapter will provide a brief background on South Africa in order to form an understanding of the Boers and their conflicted relationship with the British.

Furthermore, this chapter illustrates how Churchill came to be a Boer prisoner of war (POW). The main topics are Boer culture, Churchill's arrival in South Africa, and Churchill's capture by the Boers. In order to better understand Churchill's experience as a Boer POW, it is important to know how the Boer culture developed and the varied conflicts leading up to the Boer War of 1899-1902.

Professionally Churchill's career as a writer and correspondent continued to improve with his publication of *The River War*, about his experiences in the Sudan. Furthermore, he established credentials as a well-paid journalist. In addition, his network of advantageous relationships continued to remain strong; nevertheless, Churchill's political ambitions had stalled somewhat after his failed election. Despite his optimism that this first political stumble was merely a learning experience, the negative effects to his reputation meant that he needed to rebuild any lost standing as quickly as possible in order to win a future election.

Churchill's leadership traits of bravery, optimism, candor, high energy, and compassion all came together during the ambush on the train that led to Churchill's capture. Nonetheless, an understanding of the Boer culture, religion, and racial views is essential to understand Churchill's observations after his capture.

### Boer Culture

In April 1652, the Dutch East India Company established the first permanent European settlement at Table Bay, named Cape Colony and populated with just over one hundred Dutch colonists.<sup>95</sup> The settlement's initial purpose was to resupply company ships with fresh foods transiting to and from the East Indies.<sup>96</sup> Religion played an important role in the Boer culture providing the conservative foundation to the Boer belief system, which continued through the Boer War (1899-1902). Churchill learned of the strength of these religious beliefs first hand during conversations with his Boer captors. The conversations gave Churchill insight into their commitment. The Boers based their religion on 17th century Dutch Protestant tradition, which promoted very conservative fundamentalist and egalitarian beliefs which when combined with the dispersed Dutch colonists made them uncooperative to govern.<sup>97</sup>

The British government underestimated the influence of the Boer belief system when trying to administer the Boers. Churchill himself noted during conversations with his Boer captors the strong religious convictions of God protecting the Boers whenever something good happened especially during battle. While he did not necessarily agree with their logic, Churchill respected their unwavering belief and optimism in their cause despite not realizing how committed the British were to sending more soldiers. Churchill felt a similar feeling of commitment in his own pursuit of political office enabled by his

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<sup>95</sup>Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo Boer War* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976), 4.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House Publishers, 1979), 8.

optimism and bravery in the face of his numerous near misses in combat and political setbacks.

The settlers lived a solitary independent agricultural lifestyle on farmsteads on the veld or plains. Despite the efforts of the Dutch East India Company, the colonists continued to migrate away from any government control. From almost the start of the colony, the Boers displayed an ingrained and unwavering dislike of any government from the start of the colony and consequently worked against any government that held laws and beliefs that were different from their conservative ideals.<sup>98</sup>

The British first became involved in the Dutch colony when, in 1795, a French style republic replaced the Dutch royal government. In 1814, the colony officially became a possession of the British Empire.<sup>99</sup> The British government viewed the Cape Colony as a valuable link to secure the sea routes between Britain and India.<sup>100</sup>

Shortly thereafter, it became evident that British administration of the Cape Colony did not agree with the colonists. It turned out that the Boers disliked the British governance even more than the Dutch East India Company. This aversion to colonial governance was normal for the Boers, whose fiercely independent culture viewed any external controls against them to be unacceptable. British rule oriented its policies towards protecting the human rights of the natives who were living as slaves to the Boers.

What ultimately caused the deepest conflicts between the Boers and the British is that the British government chose to ignore Boer sensitivities to any change of domestic

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<sup>98</sup>Farwell, 5.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Pakenham, 7.

policies and treated them as inferior colonists. The Boers consistent intolerance for compromise caused them to resist governance by anyone other than Boers. The Boer culture viewed their servants as a domestic personal service, and not as services that the British colonial government should oversee. However, the British continued with measures to grant protections to the black Africans and Hottentots who worked for the Boers. Ultimately, the depth of Boer dislike for external interference with their treatment of black Africans became an enduring common cause for Boers to dislike British rule despite any positive results of British action. This common cause proved to be a motivator for many Boers in both Boer Wars (1880-1881), (1899-1902).

The final straw, which broke the feeble status quo in the Cape Colony, was the legal emancipation of all slaves in the British colonies passed on 1 December 1834.<sup>101</sup> The economy in South Africa, at that time, was agrarian based primarily on black African slave labor, which meant that the Boers lost their labor force in one move. The British Empire did offer compensation for the emancipation of the slaves; however, the payment was much less than expected and required the effected Boer to travel to London to collect the payment.<sup>102</sup> The British government should have grasped the difficulty of how to govern the Boers by now. They did not accurately assess the negative impact of both liberating the farm labor and not providing accessible payments. It may have been that the British government understood a lack of accessible payments would create even more animosity, and the existence of a payment was a token gesture not meant for the Boers to collect.

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<sup>101</sup>Farwell, 6.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

Based on the perceived minimal resource benefit of South Africa since no diamonds or gold were discovered until 1870, South Africa was a low priority and saving money for the empire was the motivation. The impractical compensation process for a Boer to collect payment for losing essentially all their farm labor left a deep sense of disrespect of the British by the Boers. Overall, this policy change by the British government left the Boers fuming and over the next few years, they discussed amongst themselves how to deal with this latest British affront. This law solidified Boer resentment towards British rule further entrenching a common belief that the British disrespected Boer domestic culture, by giving black Africans any civil rights.

The critical points of conflict between the British and Boers, which led to the Boer War (1899-1902), were their incompatible human rights perspectives that negatively influenced the relationship both culturally and diplomatically. The potential profits from natural resources within the Boer republics motivated the British to continue diplomatic and military pressure on the Boers. Appendix C provides a more detailed historical summary of the conflicted relationship between the Boer republics and the British government.

### Churchill Travels to South Africa

Churchill knew after just six months in the military that he was not a career officer and focused on setting the conditions to enter politics as quickly as possible, but realized that his military and journalistic careers would lay the political foundation for his future. He built a respectable reputation in a short time period, but still lacked the influence he needed for election to parliament. Until his fame from his Boer War experience, Churchill did not have the support necessary for election to Parliament. The



difference between the conflict in Sudan and South Africa was the size of the war and the strong popular support of the British public.

The ultimatum issued by the Transvaal to stop British military reinforcements expired on 11 October 1899 without response from the British government and the first of the British Army Corps ships, *Dunnotar Castle*, sailed for South Africa on 14 October 1899.<sup>103</sup> On the ship, was twenty-four year old civilian journalist Winston Churchill, along with Major General Sir Redvers Buller, the commander of all British forces in South Africa and his staff.<sup>104</sup> Shortly after his first lost election, Churchill financially needed to continue his literary pursuits until another opportunity arose for him to build his reputation. A politician at heart, Churchill seized on the brewing war in South Africa as another means to build his reputation and his bank account. Unfortunately, the Boer War proved to be not only the longest, but also the costliest of the British colonial wars.<sup>105</sup>

Churchill worked for weeks to make the necessary preparations to travel to South Africa since diplomatic negotiations had broken down and war seemed imminent. By now, Churchill was well aware of the political scene in London, and made good use of his extensive connections in the British government to prepare for his trip. Before his departure to South Africa, Churchill visited with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir Joseph Chamberlain where Churchill shared his plans for the trip. Churchill also

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<sup>103</sup>Pakenham, 116.

<sup>104</sup>Winston S. Churchill. *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (New York: Longman's, Green, and Co, 1900), 1-3.

<sup>105</sup>Russell, 250.

received Chamberlain's assessment of the state of affairs in South Africa and assured Churchill that news of his trip would make it to Milner in South Africa.<sup>106</sup>

He also received letters of introduction to Milner from a wealthy businessperson Alfred Beit. Beit made his fortune from the gold industry of South Africa and was one of the wealthy executives Milner relied upon to assist his cause of sending more troops to the Transvaal.<sup>107</sup> Churchill had relationships with each of the major actors who had the most involvement in starting the Boer War (1899-1902) with the exception of Cecil Rhodes. Since Chamberlain, Milner and Beit all had great influence in South Africa; it was a normal habit for Churchill to seek relationships with each man.

Based on Churchill's past experiences, his motivations for going to South Africa were twofold, to go where there was the greatest opportunity for him to build his reputation for election to Parliament and to earn as much money as possible reporting on the conflict. By this time in Churchill's life, he had developed a literary following from his books and an established reputation as a well-known war correspondent. Churchill determined that going to South Africa would give him the opportunity to build his political capital high enough to enable his election to political office.

For employment, Churchill used his established credentials as a war correspondent to secure a contract with *The Morning Post* newspaper paying 250 pounds a month for four months including all expenses, which by today's equivalent would be

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<sup>106</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1049-1050.

<sup>107</sup> Pakenham, 88-89.

over 160,000 pounds.<sup>108</sup> Churchill used his family's connections with General Buller's aide-de-camp, an appointed Colonel, Lord Gerard, to secure a promise of commission in the Lancashire Hussars and attachment to the same unit.<sup>109</sup> Colonel Lord Gerard commanded this cavalry regiment and Churchill again tried to improve his position with his status as either a journalist or military officer depending on the situation.

Churchill wanted to have the status of being half soldier and half correspondent while in South Africa in order to avoid too much military control, but remain eligible for any medals for his actions. He wanted to have the best of both worlds, civilian or military, in order to benefit his reputation. In Churchill's logic, it made perfect sense to have no burden of military responsibility, but instead have a flexible status that he could change as he saw fit.

On 12 October 1899, Boer forces had crossed into Cape Colony and quickly surrounded the cities of Mafeking with 1,200 troops and Kimberly with 4,800 troops.<sup>110</sup> These cities are depicted on figure 2 for reference. Within the city of Ladysmith were roughly thirteen thousand British soldiers of the Natal Field Force, commanded by Lieutenant General Sir George White.<sup>111</sup> The Natal Field Force comprised all but a few locally grown British forces already in South Africa, including the reinforcements sent to

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<sup>108</sup>Roy Jenkins. *Churchill A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Grioux 2001), 50.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>110</sup>Russell, 251.

<sup>111</sup>Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (New York: Opsrey, 2003), 37.

dissuade the Boers from war. This left Buller's Army Corps of fifty thousand dispatched from India to continue the war.

The transatlantic trip took nineteen days and upon his arrival to Cape Town on 30 October 1899, Churchill immediately made for the frontlines. While they were sailing British forces had already suffered multiple setbacks with the largest being the Boers laying siege to the city of Ladysmith.



Figure 2. Map of South Africa, 1899

Source: Gregory Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902* (New York: Osprey, 2003), Introduction.

The Natal Field Force consisted in total of approximately fifteen thousand British and locally grown soldiers. However, despite having the upper hand early in the war, the Boer sieges of the three cities had a negative impact on Boer strategic goals. Up to this

point, the Boers had predominantly defeated the British in every battle. The Boer forces tied up half of their forces laying siege to British forces, consequently they could not follow through to reach their ultimate end state.<sup>112</sup> The Boers were unable to capitalize on their speed and initiative to seize control of ports preventing British reinforcement and sue for peace before the British reached South Africa.

As the war progressed, it became evident that attrition would be the downfall of the Boers in the conventional war, since they could not easily replace casualties or those the British captured. The British had the ability to reach out across the empire and bring troops from Canada, Australia and India. Before Churchill's capture, his opinion of the Boers was that of a backwards, corrupt group committed to preserving their antiquated lifestyles.<sup>113</sup> His opinions resulted from the background provided by Churchill's political contacts and other pro-British sources.

Churchill intended to travel to Ladysmith where he expected significant action to write about; however, the Boer forces had already surrounded Ladysmith. Instead, Churchill remained in Estcourt for one week, just 40 miles from Ladysmith.<sup>114</sup> Churchill wanted to be in the action as quickly as possible. He persistently tried to arrange ways to get past the Boer lines into Ladysmith without success. Ironically, his persistence and optimism, which had served him well in other situations, led to his capture on the armored train, refer to the picture of the armored train on figure 3.

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>113</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 98.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 38, 74.

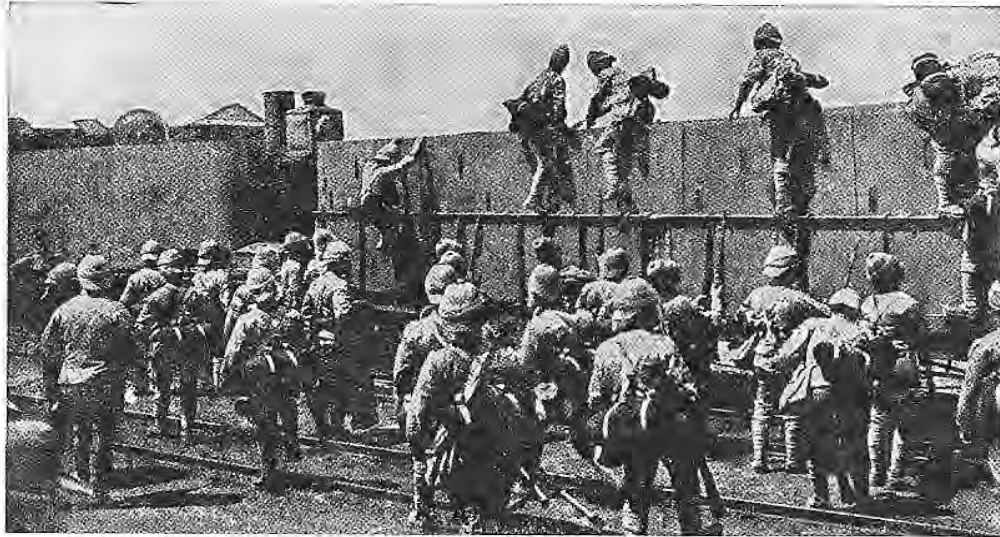
His first attempt to get to Ladysmith was by offering payment to a local cavalry soldier whose unit was temporarily located in Estcourt.<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, the soldier reportedly could not gain permission to take Churchill. A restless Churchill decided that the next best option was to take a reconnaissance trip, via armored train. Churchill joined an armored train departing Estcourt on 15 November 1899 at the request of Captain Haldane, an old acquaintance, who had the mission of conducting reconnaissance by train north to the small town of Colenso fourteen miles south of Ladysmith.<sup>116</sup> The mission was to travel towards the small town of Chieveley, near Colenso, observing the surrounding terrain for enemy Boers and then returning to Estcourt.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup>H. W. Kinsey, "Churchill and Ladysmith," *Military History Journal* 7, no. 3 (1987), <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol073hk.html> (accessed 29 April 2010).

<sup>116</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 244. This same Haldane helped Churchill get his appointment to the Tirah Expedition (1897-1898) on the Indian Frontier.

<sup>117</sup>W. Churchill. *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 75-77.



The Start



The End

# THE ARMoured TRAIN

Figure 3. Picture of the armored train action on 15 November 1899  
*Source:* Winston S. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), 245.

Churchill departed on the train that consisted of five cars and a locomotive with tender for coal. In total, there were one hundred twenty men aboard the armored train.<sup>118</sup> Churchill realized the danger of the armored train; however he had rode it once before and decided it was worth the risk. He felt that while, —~~at~~hing looks more formidable and impressive than an armored train; nothing is in fact more vulnerable and helpless. It was only necessary to blow up a bridge or culvert to leave the monster stranded far from home and help, at the mercy of enemy.”<sup>119</sup> Despite acknowledging the high risk of participating in the armored train mission, Churchill’s optimistically believed nothing bad would happen on the trip.

#### The Armored Train Ambush

The ambush itself was where Churchill’s qualities of bravery, optimism, high energy, candor and compassion came together in one well-recognized event. After the ambush and during his imprisonment, Churchill’s reputation grew enormously and became strong enough for him to win election to Parliament. An explanation of the ambush provides the details of how dangerous the attack was and how well Churchill performed until his capture. While he had performed bravely in the past, the large amount of fame lavished upon him from eyewitnesses to this event was the crucial difference.

After a quiet fourteen-mile ride from Estcourt, the train reached Chieveley where Churchill observed a group of roughly one hundred Boer horsemen riding a few miles

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<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>119</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 244.



away.<sup>120</sup> At roughly the same time, the observers on the train saw distant Boer movement headed south towards them. A telegraph operator on the train quickly sent a message from Chieveley and the train started on the return route to Estcourt.<sup>121</sup>

Shortly after departing Chieveley, Churchill and the soldiers observed Boer riflemen on the ridge six hundred yards from the train, but still did not feel in any real danger.<sup>122</sup> However, once the shooting began, which included Boer field guns and a maxim machine gun, the seriousness of the attack panicked the train engineer and the engineer rapidly increased the train's speed.

As the train rounded a curve at over forty miles per hour, it struck a large boulder set in the middle of the tracks.<sup>123</sup> The first three cars of the train were derailed but the engine remained on the rails. The train had passed through the ambush by roughly 600 yards before striking the boulder, but the Boers quickly relocated to continue the attack on the disabled train. Figure 4 depicts how the rail cars were arrayed during the ambush.

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<sup>120</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 77.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 79-80.

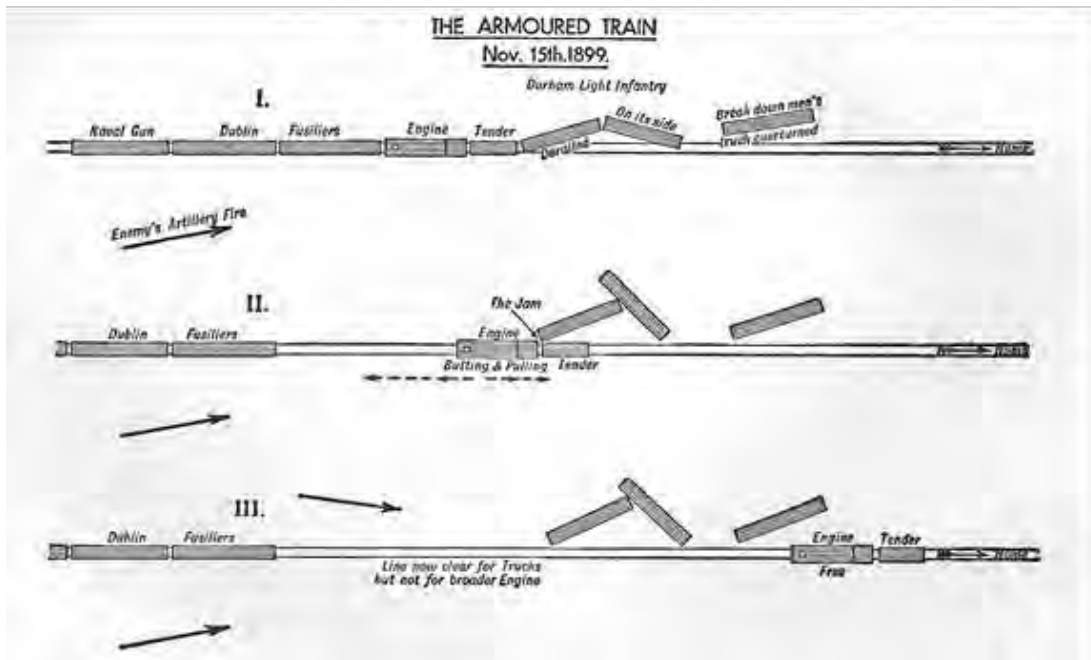


Figure 4. Diagram of the armored train actions 15 November 1899  
Source: Winston S. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (New York: Longman's, Green, and Co, 1900), 78.

At this point, Churchill displayed an extremely courageous response under fire, quickly conferred with Haldane and ran up the track, in order to determine if the locomotive could move.<sup>124</sup> For the next hour, Haldane and the soldiers returned fire against the repositioned Boer forces shooting down on them. Churchill and the train engineer quickly surveyed the rails ahead and found them to be undamaged, but blocked by overturned train cars. Churchill's bravery and optimism inspired the frightened engineer to get the locomotive ready to move. Churchill returned, under increasing enemy fire, to tell Captain Haldane his plan to push the cars off the rail line. Haldane

<sup>124</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 245-246.

continued to return fire against the Boers from the rear three cars while Churchill worked at the front to push or ram the overturned cars out of the way.

All the while, the Boer fire increased as their forces focused their rifles on the stationary train. Churchill coordinated the movement of the train with the combined human effort of the British soldiers in the front of the train to push and pull one of the cars off the rails. They tried to move the train forward, still attached to the rear three cars, but the footplate of the engine caught the overturned car (figure 4 numeral II).<sup>125</sup> Finally, after much effort, the engine rammed its way past the overturned car, but the rear cars had inadvertently become detached from the engine. The separate train cars were now too far away for the British soldiers to reattach with ease. This is likely from enemy fire depicted on figure 4 numeral III.<sup>126</sup>

Churchill and Haldane then decided to have the wounded loaded on the locomotive and the soldiers able to walk would use the engine as cover while moving south to a cluster of buildings eight hundred yards down the tracks.<sup>127</sup> After loading the wounded, the Boer rifle fire was withering and accurate with support from three 15-pound field guns and a maxim machine gun.<sup>128</sup> The locomotive and tender began to slowly move down the track south towards Estcourt under continued heavy fire with over forty wounded crammed into whatever space they could find while the British infantry walked along the train. The increased Boer fire panicked the engineer, who increased the

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<sup>125</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 87-88.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

train speed leaving the infantry behind until Churchill, who was next to the engineer, made him stop the train for them to catch up.<sup>129</sup> Before disembarking, Churchill directed the train to cross the nearby bridge over the Blue Krantz River and wait for them to catch up.

This was a critical moment for Churchill because, in a selfless act of compassion and bravery, he disembarked from the relative safety of the train to return for Captain Haldane and his soldiers who were on foot trying to catch up to the engine and tender. Displaying extreme courage and compassion, Churchill wanted to do all he could to aid those on foot, many of which the Boers had wounded. He had moved 200 yards from the train toward the survivors when, —instead of Haldane and his company, two figures in plain clothes appeared upon the line. ‘Plate-layers!’ I said to myself, and then with a surge of realization, ‘Boers!’<sup>130</sup> Churchill believed at first glance that the Boers were civilian rail repair workers or plate-layers.

Upon contact with the two Boers, Churchill made a run for it without success, they shot at him each twice, barely missing him, but in fact, a bullet splinter cut his hand.<sup>131</sup> He climbed through a wire fence along the railroad track and decided to try to cross the Blue Krantz River two hundred yards away, but when Churchill rose to make his run for the river, a Boer horseman appeared forty yards away and quickly aimed a rifle at him.<sup>132</sup> Churchill finally surrendered, and reflected upon Napoleon Bonaparte’s

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>130</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 250.

<sup>131</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 94.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

words that, “When one is alone and unarmed, a surrender may be pardoned.”<sup>133</sup> As he began walking under Boer guard back towards the rest of the prisoners, a heavy rain began, reflecting Churchill’s mood. He noted in his book that ironically just days before his capture, he proclaimed in a letter to a military officer friend at home that there had been too many surrenders already in this war and hoped they should be highly discouraged.<sup>134</sup> This letter was an example of Churchill’s, candor and sometimes-impulsive nature; however, he soon learned how the Boers treated their prisoners.

One immediate effect of Churchill’s time as a POW was that the Boers humbled Churchill through the civil treatment he unexpectedly received and the psychological impact of being a POW. Churchill realized that he had no control over his fate and that the Boers could have easily executed him as a non-combatant who played a significant, yet uncharacteristic role of a civilian during the ambush on the train.<sup>135</sup> As the prisoners formed up and began to walk, Churchill recalled that, in reality, the Boers were professional and demonstrated compassion, a fact that Churchill respected. One Boer efficiently bandaged his injured hand, later one provided a hat to Churchill during the rainstorm, and many spoke excellent English.<sup>136</sup>

While stopped at the Boer headquarters, Churchill, in his typical forward manner, introduced himself as a journalist and provided his credentials to a lower Boer officer.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 252.

<sup>134</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 95.

<sup>135</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 258.

<sup>136</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 98, 125.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 101-102.

The Boer chain of command quickly recognized Churchill's name from both his family's elite reputation and numerous publications. The Boers realized that Churchill would be a valuable prisoner and the Boers would waive the practice of immediately returning non-combatants in his case.<sup>138</sup> Churchill's confidence and optimism dimmed after the Boers refused to release him.

It was still 15 November 1899 and the twenty-four year old Churchill was admittedly depressed after the ambush; however, he gained respect for the Boers as being civil captors and consequently he did not lose his energy to converse with the enemy. The discussions Churchill had with the Boers were eye opening for him. The Boers he spoke with were open with their convictions and views on the conflict. The Boers did not want to stop fighting and they were unsettled not knowing the objectives of what Buller and his corps of fifty thousand were doing.<sup>139</sup> Churchill recognized that, while he talked with the Boers over who would win the war, imprisonment signified that the war was over for him, which encouraged his thoughts of escape. Churchill wanted very much to get back into the action in order to keep earning money as a correspondent and further build his reputation. He felt that imprisonment would cost him his job and valuable experience as it looked like the war would be long and Churchill would be a POW.

The Boers marched Churchill and their prisoners north for two days towards the train station that would transport them to Pretoria for imprisonment.<sup>140</sup> During the one-day train ride, Churchill discerned two important themes from his conversations with the

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 96,124.

Boers he spoke with: first, that the capitalists who wanted all the resources in South Africa caused the war, and secondly that the Boers would not accept the British social reforms meant to give the black Africans representation equal to the whites.<sup>141</sup> The first point regarding resources was hard to argue against, given the past British actions to control the diamond mines and now the efforts to pressure the Transvaal government. The second point resonated with Churchill to be a more dangerous cultural issue since blacks were a long time source for labor for Boers to provide for their families until the British passed the emancipation law. His newfound Boer perspective enabled him to understand how legitimately angry the Boers were towards Britain.

The issue of granting rights to the black Africans historically had several negative facets tied to it such as, poor compensation by the British for changing the law and a perceived attack on the Boer way of life. The latter was a universal motivation for Boers to fight the British than the capitalist motivations, which were mainly in Johannesburg and Kimberly. Churchill clearly grasped the fact that the roots of racial discrimination in South Africa were very deep. Other noteworthy dialogues compared the conflict to the American Revolution and that the Boers were fighting for their freedom from British interference.<sup>142</sup> Ironically, the motivation for Milner to exert such pressure on the Transvaal government stemmed from lack of representation of the British living and working in the Transvaal, which was a major issue of the Americans against the British.

After three days of travel, Churchill and his group of fifty-two prisoners arrived in Pretoria and the Boers marched them from the train station to the States Model School

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid., 131-134.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 118.

prison where the Boers held the British officers separately from the enlisted. It was during his captivity that Churchill realized, as his captors whom had just tried to kill him had treated him with respect, he learned a lesson from this experience when dealing with the defeated in the future.

Along with Churchill's election, the second most significant thing from his POW experience, discussed further in chapter 4, was that his experience motivated Churchill to accomplish the creation of two constitutions giving independence to both the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony after losing the Boer War (1899-1902). As fate would have it, when he served as the Colonial under Secretary in 1906 he provided much of the content of the constitutions of the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony after the war. His arbitration for the self-governance of the Boer republics took the position of being very generous and understanding.<sup>143</sup> If Churchill had not had the unique POW experience where he lived and conversed with the Boers, he may not have developed the compassion and understanding for the Boer culture. This experience proved to be quite beneficial to Churchill's political career in multiple ways.

Churchill's captivity provided him an adequate quality of life, which included the ability to purchase alcohol, send and receive mail, and purchase other comfort items from a local shopkeeper who visited the prison daily.<sup>144</sup> Churchill had such a good quality of life as a POW because he lived with the British officers. The enlisted had a reduced food ration and lived a more deprived existence in a camp on a racecourse.<sup>145</sup> One result of

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<sup>143</sup>Rose, 68.

<sup>144</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 146-148.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.



Churchill's access to outside goods, which aided his later escape, was the purchase of a tweed suit, which he described as very different from the Government Issue prison clothes that he wore.<sup>146</sup> While he did not reveal his thoughts directly, the suit was an initial step towards an escape plan.

Churchill had the opportunity to both write letters requesting his release from the Transvaal government and study the security arrangement. His days were monotonous and consisted of playing chess, cards and smoking cigarettes.<sup>147</sup> Churchill's writings reflected a restless boredom and depression. He followed the war through heavily pro-Boer conversations with the prison staff some limited mail and reading books.<sup>148</sup>

Despite having the opportunity, Churchill claimed writer's block and that he was not motivated to write while a POW. The Boers continued to deny Churchill's requests for release. In fact, General Joubert read the newspaper accounts of Churchill's actions during the armored train battle and telegraphed the Transvaal government on 19 November telling them directly not to release Churchill until after the war ended.<sup>149</sup> Unbeknownst to Churchill, the news of his actions on the armored train made him a national celebrity, starting from the initial reports from the day of the attack to making headline news in both South Africa and England later in December 1899.<sup>150</sup> Churchill's

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 153-170.

<sup>149</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1075.

<sup>150</sup>Russell, 261.

engagements with the Boers, acts of bravery, and POW time had turned him into more of a celebrity than he had ever dreamed of becoming.

Churchill received clear recognition for his gallant actions, but only as a civilian. Had he been a commissioned officer, there would have been a stronger case for both a campaign medal and a potentially a Victoria Cross for bravery; however, it would not happen. Churchill's efforts to straddle the line between being a commissioned officer in the British Army after his resignation and civilian correspondent were unsuccessful. They did not recognize Churchill as a military member. Regardless of receiving military recognition, Churchill's reputation peaked; the newspapers had never as favorably portrayed Churchill as they did in the articles on the armored train attack.

As evidence of his optimistic nature when it came to receiving recognition, he wrote directly to Chamberlain in May 1901 requesting military recognition and that any award would benefit Churchill's constituents in politics and future wife rather than himself.<sup>151</sup> This was a bold move, but not unusual in the context of how large Churchill's ego had grown and the depth of his family connections. Though still young at twenty-six and a new member of parliament, Churchill thought nothing of asking a high government official, a fellow politician, for a personal favor. In addition, another possible reason that he did not receive any military decorations was speculation that Major General

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<sup>151</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1069-1070.

Kitchener's dislike ensured that Churchill did not receive any military awards.<sup>152</sup> Regardless, Churchill remained popular in the eyes of the British people.

Years later, to Churchill's credit while serving as the Home Secretary in 1910, he awarded the Albert Medal, a civilian equivalent to the Victoria Cross, to the train engineer and another railroad worker for their actions that day in 1899.<sup>153</sup> Churchill, while himself a self-promoter and fame seeking politician, stayed true to his compassionate side by following through with ensuring the British awarded those deserving. This is undeniably a trait of a remarkable leader.

By this point in Churchill's life, both British military and political circles knew his reputation. Prior to traveling to South Africa, Churchill had a relatively strong reputation; however, he did not yet have the political influence to mount a successful campaign for a seat in parliament. Churchill demonstrated and documented his leadership traits of bravery, optimism, high energy, candor, and compassion at the train ambush. As a result the British recognized Churchill for his actions, whereby greatly improving his reputation.

The skill, important in facilitating his trip to South Africa, was his ability to leverage political and military contacts. Without his contacts, he would not have had the access and permissions to travel freely. His writing abilities qualified him as a highly paid newspaper correspondent, and increasingly he was more outspoken in his texts as a

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<sup>152</sup>Russell, 264. This same Kitchener knew him from the Sudan and did not care for Churchill or his motivations. It also did not help that Churchill's book *The River War* criticized Kitchener.

<sup>153</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*; 1071.

means to furthering his reputation while in South Africa. Prior to his capture, Churchill's propensity for kindness towards opponents was non-existent. However, the humane treatment Churchill received from the Boers after the battle caused Churchill to realize the importance of compassion when dealing with the conquered.

Before he departed for South Africa his well-developed work ethic and focus enabled him to do everything in his power to set the conditions as his most advantageous to date. He took the time to speak with every political power broker that he knew in the British government, such as Chamberlain and the businessperson Albert Reit, wealthy from the South African gold, in order to facilitate his access in South Africa. He arranged for the most lucrative salary to date from the newspaper he worked for while in South Africa. To enable military recognition for bravery, he tried, unsuccessfully, to arrange for a commission back into the British Army while on the ship over to South Africa. Churchill's ambition focused on building his reputation for election to office after his time in South Africa.

The actual attack on the armored train caused Churchill to employ numerous positive leadership qualities such as his bravery, leadership, decisiveness, coolness under fire, inspiration, and compassion for not leaving his comrades behind and ensured the wounded escaped. He displayed these qualities within a one-hour action and ensuring the wounded soldiers escaped to report their story back to the British military. His actions had the same purpose throughout his life, to enable his election to Parliament as soon as possible. Had he not won election after South Africa, Churchill would have continued building upon his reputation and finances but would not have realized his political goal. The next chapter will discuss his dramatic escape and the controversy that followed.

## CHAPTER 4

### CHURCHILL'S ESCAPE AND RISE TO POLITICAL OFFICE

The focus for this chapter will be Churchill's escape, the controversy that followed his escape, his remaining time in South Africa as a commissioned officer, his election to Parliament, and his role in drafting the constitutions granting independence to the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony. Related to the primary research question, Churchill's successful escape caused his growing fame from brave actions at the train ambush to explode. After Churchill's prisoner of war (POW) escape, he successfully requested a commission as a British Army officer remaining in South Africa and then returned to Britain where he won his first election to Parliament. Churchill thoroughly calculated his decision to remain in South Africa after his POW time in order to gain more popularity with the British people as a military officer. Unlike the Sudan, there was enormous popular support behind Churchill as a Boer War hero since there was substantial British involvement still in South Africa. Because of his time as a Boer POW, Churchill drafted constitutions that granted independence to both former Boer republics against British government sentiments. His captivity taught him the compassion to be generous towards the defeated, as the Boers had treated him humanely after the November 1899 train ambush.

Churchill made his dramatic escape only after the denial of his written petitions to the Boer government for his freedom as a civilian non-combatant. He realized that the Boers wanted to keep him imprisoned. The critical action for Churchill regarding his escape was how he communicated his escape to the public and not the escape itself. He employed his well-developed writing and speaking skills to maximize his recognition

from the getaway. This included ensuring U.S. newspapers received word of his breakout. The fact that his escape occurred just after the British military suffered several major setbacks in the war, made the British public want any sort of good news story from South Africa. Hence, this POW flight only added to Churchill's reputation.

A significant result from Churchill's time as a POW was political nomination to run for Parliament. Immediately upon his return to British held territory, Churchill received offers from around Britain to stand for election as a candidate representing various districts.<sup>154</sup> Prior to his trip to South Africa, he had no such offers of running for Parliament. Despite having promising political offers in Britain, Churchill decided to remain in South Africa and obtained an unpaid Army commission in order to pursue military glory until the British captured Pretoria. The reason for his decision to stay in South Africa instead of immediately returning home to run for political office was unclear; however, based his previous experience, Churchill wanted to build his reputation.

With his political ambitions assured through another election upon his return, Churchill could now focus on the financial goal of his South African experience. He needed to renew his flow of newspaper articles and through his military commission gained the access he needed for writing material as well as position himself to receive military medals. Churchill, unfortunately, did not have another episode like the armored train, which gave him the opportunity to add to his already enormous fame.

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<sup>154</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1148.

Regarding the controversy that grew out of Churchill's escape, it is important to know some of the details of what happened in order to understand why there was any controversy to his escape. Three POWs planned to escape together, Churchill, Captain Haldane and Regimental Sergeant Major Brockie. Haldane was the leader of the group and developed the majority of the plan. Haldane and Brockie planned for weeks independent of Churchill, who focused on gaining his freedom through written petitions to the Boer government.<sup>155</sup> He had written numerous times to the Secretary of War de Souza petitioning for release; however, the Secretary of War de Souza denied each request.<sup>156</sup> On 10 December 1899, Churchill decided that he must escape instead of hoping for repatriation by the Boer government.<sup>157</sup> Instead of resigning himself to captivity, Churchill's decisive personality decided that he had no other option than escape. Churchill's courage at the armored train gave him a popular reputation with the other POWs, but caused the Boer government to refuse his release because he was a high value prisoner to the Boers.

The original escape plan was to climb the east wall of the prison because it offered the most concealment and then either walking or travelling by train three hundred miles west to Delagoa Bay in Portuguese East Africa.<sup>158</sup> Haldane and Brockie could both speak the local languages and remained in good physical condition, however; they still let

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<sup>155</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 268.

<sup>156</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1075, 1077-1079.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, 1087.

<sup>158</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 188.

the physically weaker Churchill convince them to let him join them in the last few days before the escape.<sup>159</sup> Churchill optimistically offered Haldane that in the event of their successful escape; Churchill would ensure that Haldane received the fame for orchestrating the escape.<sup>160</sup> Churchill's positive qualities of decisiveness, optimism and courage and bad qualities of impulsiveness, physical limitations and selfishness came together in his actions during his escape.

On 12 December 1899, the group decided the conditions were right for escape; however, Churchill was the only one able to climb the wall undetected and both Haldane and Brockie remained imprisoned.<sup>161</sup> Churchill climbed the wall and hid in the bushes on the other side next to the street to await his companions. While trying to figure out when Haldane and Brockie would follow him, Churchill received word that the Boers had seen Haldane trying to climb the wall, which would put the guards on alert. Churchill waited an hour and a half and after realizing they could not follow and since he could not climb back inside, he headed out.<sup>162</sup> The fact that he waited an hour and a half after jumping the wall should be evidence that he would not abandon Haldane and Brockie, however there were questions later surrounding the details of his escape. The issue of controversy began the night Churchill escaped alone, instead of as a group of three.

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 1087.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 1101-1102.

<sup>161</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 271.

<sup>162</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1095.



The criticism of Churchill's escape that haunted him professionally afterwards was that he left Haldane and Brockie behind. After all, it was their escape plan built for many weeks. Haldane reflected that on the night of the escape, they could not seem to catch a moment where the sentries were away from their intended spot for jumping over the perimeter wall and they decided to eat dinner and return to try again.<sup>163</sup> He felt that Churchill, who was behaving quite excitedly that night, saw an opportunity to scale the wall alone, just after they decided to go for dinner and could not resist the temptation, despite knowing his companions could not easily follow him.<sup>164</sup> Haldane thought that Churchill, returning to British lines, should have quickly admitted to knowingly climbing the wall without them.

This scenario explained by Haldane in his memoirs was his interpretation of what happened. Haldane felt that Churchill impulsively saw an opportunity and got over the wall without any assistance and did not intend to return. Churchill, being physically weakest of the three, thought his climb over the wall relieved the other two of the responsibility to help him.<sup>165</sup> However, the fact that he waited for an hour and a half before departing on his own refutes claims by Haldane that Churchill intended to leave them behind to stay prisoners. Simply put, Haldane and Brockie did not have the opportunity that night to escape whereas Churchill did. Churchill waited for them not wanting to leave without them, but went ahead with the escape since he could not climb

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<sup>163</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1103-1104.

<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*, 1103-1104.

<sup>165</sup>*Ibid.*, 1097.

back inside without detection. The fact that they could not all escape together was due to circumstances beyond Churchill's control. Haldane and Brockie were understandably upset over Churchill's solo escape and ensuing fame. If Churchill succeeded, Haldane would receive no recognition for his plan of escape. Most who knew Churchill understood that this was the ambitious way in which Churchill liked for things to work out. Based on all accounts of the escape and the controversy, the fact that Churchill waited for the other two negates any debate over whether he was in any sort of breach with Haldane and Brockie.

The debate surrounding Churchill's escape followed him for years resulting in Churchill filing a lawsuit. In 1912, Churchill sued *Blackwoods Magazine* for publishing a disparaging account of the escape, which portrayed Churchill as leaving his comrades behind, and eventually won.<sup>166</sup> It was a tense issue for Churchill, which eventually resolved in his favor, because if the court ruled against him, it would have ruined Churchill's reputation if the single event, which brought him so much fame and good fortune, proved to be untrue.

After waiting an hour and a half and despite his fears, Churchill put his hat on, and walked out of the bushes, casually walked past a sentry and down the street into Pretoria.<sup>167</sup> Churchill did not speak any indigenous languages; he had seventy-five pounds and a few chocolate bars in his pocket, no map or compass and three hundred

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<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 1112.

<sup>167</sup>W. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, 187.

miles to cover in order to reach Delagoa Bay and freedom.<sup>168</sup> Regardless of the opinion of Churchill's actions, his escape was extremely bold.

Churchill, while fearful at times, remained optimistic that he could escape despite knowing the odds were against him. He stuck to his basic plan to catch the train headed west and relied on his wits and luck to carry him through with his plan. He left a lot to chance, but believed that it was better to try to escape and fail rather than turn himself in and remain imprisoned indefinitely. Churchill also realized that the British campaign was moving much slower than expected and it was unlikely that British forces would capture Pretoria by February 1900.<sup>169</sup>

Churchill walked through Pretoria and managed to board an unknown freight train and ride until morning hiding among coal sacks. Things continued to fall into place for Churchill. After jumping off the train at night, Churchill proceeded on foot lost in the darkness where he soon became fatigued due to his lack of physical conditioning. Exhausted and in the middle of the night, Churchill approached an isolated house next to a coalmine and knocked on the door.<sup>170</sup>

After the residents of the house invited Churchill inside, Churchill revealed his identity and realized that he had found a British coal miner and his four British subordinates tasked to keep the coalmine ready for future mining after the war ended.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 272.

<sup>169</sup>R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume 1, Part 2 1896-1900*, 1967. 1056.

<sup>170</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 280-282.

<sup>171</sup>*Ibid.*, 283.

Luck again was on his side and the coal miners quickly devised a plan to hide Churchill in the mine until they could develop a strategy to get him across the border safely.<sup>172</sup> He spent three days in the coalmine and another three days living in a back office until the head miner hid Churchill among the cotton bales on a train headed to Delagoa Bay on 19 December 1899.<sup>173</sup> The estimated sixteen-hour trip took three days and he finally arrived in the Portuguese city of Laurengo Marques.<sup>174</sup> Having arrived at his destination, Churchill left his hiding place in the train and discretely met a British sympathizer from the coalmine.<sup>175</sup> Churchill then followed him through the city to the British Consulate and freedom.<sup>176</sup> Churchill's escape had taken nine days and by sheer luck, he had been able to befriend British sympathizers who had the ability to get him out of the country despite an intensive search. Churchill's Boer imprisonment lasted five weeks, from 15 November 1899 until 21 December 1899, which included the nine days it took him to escape to neutral territory.

As mentioned earlier, the notorious Black Week had just occurred, as British forces suffered humiliating defeats in battles at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso within the same week.<sup>177</sup> Thus, Churchill's escape was a source of much needed good news for both the British people and fueled a sense that the Boers did not always have the

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 283-285.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 286-289.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 296.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., 296, 298.

upper hand. Thanks to written and verbal accounts of his escape that Churchill provided, the British received Churchill as a hero both in England and in South Africa. Upon Churchill's return to the British held territory in South Africa, he capitalized on his newfound fame and the drama of his escape by speaking to groups of South African citizens. As evidence of the fame from his escape going global, The New York Times published a dispatch from Churchill in the United States on 28 December 1899 describing his action-filled journey to Delagoa Bay.<sup>178</sup> He worked to construct a selfless image for himself in his writings while promoting his reputation. Throughout Churchill's early life, his actions revealed a more self-promoting side to his altruistic motivations.

#### Commissioned into the South African Light Horse

Churchill's return to military service for his remaining six months in South Africa served two purposes towards achieving political office: to ensure his eligibility to receive medals and to earn money from writing articles about his observations. Churchill continued riding his newfound fame by becoming a military officer again, whereby giving him better access to the action to write his articles and further enhance his reputation as a military officer and politician.

After Churchill's return to British lines, he met with General Buller and provided what information he had about his POW experience. Buller congratulated him then asked Churchill if he could do anything for him. Churchill immediately requested a commission

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<sup>178</sup>Winston S. Churchill, "Winston Churchill's Escape: British Correspondent Tells How He Got Out of Pretoria and Eluded the Boer Watchers," *The New York Times*, 28 December 1899.

in one of the irregular units that the South Africa indigenous citizens were forming.<sup>179</sup>

Buller agreed to commission him as a Lieutenant into the 700-soldier South African Light Horse, an indigenous cavalry regiment formed in South Africa.

The conditions of the commission were that Churchill could not receive any pay from the British Army since he was still under contract from *The Morning Post*.<sup>180</sup> This had the same pattern of opportunity as his trip to Cuba, on the Indian Frontier, in the Sudan, and continuing as an officer in South Africa. In this case, Churchill wanted to restart his articles to the newspapers in order to make up for his lost time as a POW. These opportunities continued the momentum of Churchill's ambitious life. This non-conformist trait of showing initiative and continually pushing for more opportunities to prove himself, and being creative in how he went about his various positions continued throughout his professional life.

With his newly secured commission, Churchill had set the conditions where he would both enjoy more adventure and maximize his opportunities for glory without many restrictions. His arrangement while an officer reinforced that Churchill liked to be in charge and have control over his activities at all times in order to maximize his exposure to the leadership and action. Churchill fortunately was friends with the regimental commander from his previous time in the army and quickly arranged for his freedom of movement when the regiment was not actively engaged in conflict.<sup>181</sup> Through this agreement, Churchill continued reporting for *The Morning Post* as well as participating in

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<sup>179</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 305.

<sup>180</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup>Russell, 283.

numerous events during the ensuing campaign, including the liberation of the besieged Ladysmith in February 1900.

He continued participating in as many campaigns as possible, but without the level of recognition from his armored train event. He continued to be very adaptable and innovative, always remaining busy helping the chain of command and producing popular sometimes controversial news articles. He carried this creative quality into political life supporting such innovations as airpower and tanks in World War I. While sometimes not being the one to come up with the ideas, Churchill would support turning them into reality.

His high energy and bold personality served him well most of the time when dealing with those higher ranking. His reputation preceded him both for better or worse; however, Churchill's ultimate goals for South Africa again remained enhancing his reputation and developing advantageous relationships as much as possible. No doubt, he also continued looking for further action similar to the armored train where he could clearly earn a military medal for bravery to further his reputation. Unfortunately, his candid, outspoken manner often annoyed senior military leadership causing them not to recognize him for his bravery. Further, his news articles sometimes gave blunt uncomplimentary assessments of how well or poorly the British military was doing.

Churchill remained in South Africa for another six months until the British took Pretoria, the capitol of the Transvaal. He reasoned that the war was all but over at that point and had it been a simpler colonial war, things might have ended there. However, as Churchill returned to England with glory, improved financial resources and promises to run for elected office, the fighting did not stop in South Africa for another two years.

### The House of Commons and Beyond

Churchill returned triumphantly to London and indeed, by late July 1900, he secured a nomination to run for parliament representing the district of Oldham, the same place where he lost his first election. His optimistic attitude throughout his life, which he would always get through even by the smallest opportunity, held true in this new election. His list of narrow escapes in Cuba, Malakand, Sudan, and South Africa reinforced his optimistic sense of destiny and that if he remained committed to his goals, he would carry through despite contrary odds. He won the election barely by 222 votes and gained a seat in the parliament just before his twenty-sixth birthday.<sup>182</sup> Since there was so much popular support against the Boers, his election was the product of good will votes, which resulted from his time in South Africa.

The election of 1900, which put Churchill in political office for the first time, centered on the war in South Africa. His experiences in South Africa as a POW and later as an officer and correspondent gave him an outstanding reputation and celebrity status with the British people as well as politicians. Churchill, as a result, used his experience in South Africa to become an anti-Boer candidate to his constituents in order to run. Ultimately, he won the election because of his time as a POW.

In comparison to his failed election in 1899 after service in the Sudan, the Boer conflict generated stronger popular sentiments, but more importantly, Churchill did not receive significant recognition from service in Sudan. Churchill, while heroic in some instances during the Sudan experience, did not receive the widespread fame, which his

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<sup>182</sup>Roy Jenkins, *Churchill A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Grioux 2001), 65.



time in South Africa provided. The British people viewed the conflict in the Sudan as a smaller colonial war with minimal casualties and cost compared to the Boer War (1899-1902).

Soon after securing his position in the House of Commons, Churchill, rightfully concerned with his financial situation, decided to capitalize on his fame and glory. He arranged to go on a lecture circuit around England and then the United States where he earned significant profit from lecturing on his South African experiences.<sup>183</sup> This opportunity to travel and lecture was another opportunity to increase his salary and popularity across countries. Therefore, Churchill's opportunities to promote himself continued after his Boer POW experience and South African military time.

While decisive and impulsive at times, Churchill carefully planned his decisions and clearly presented his priorities. At that time, there were no salaries for members of Parliament; rather the government expected them to have adequate funds to live on through other means. Though Churchill earned a respectable amount of money from his books and the newspaper contributions, he lived a luxurious lifestyle and spent what he earned.

By 1900, Winston Churchill had published five books and numerous news articles, and accordingly he developed excellent oral and literary skills. His literary successes enabled him to achieve better financial security and further his ambitions. His candid and articulate written and oral language, quickly established him as growing presence on the political scene in England. He was one of the youngest members of parliament and did not shy away from giving lengthy, well-prepared speeches stating his

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 68.

views on the issues he thought were significant, not necessarily along his party's lines. This independent mindset and pragmatism led him to change political parties in order to best press his political agenda.

### Churchill Drafts Two Constitutions

Churchill's connection to the Boers provided him with an important background and gave him the credibility to show generosity and compassion towards the defeated Boers through a constitution for the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony, whereby granting self-governance. While serving in his first position of authority, as the undersecretary for the Colonial Secretary, Churchill, contributed most of the ideas, plans, and guidance, which developed both constitutions. His unusual connection to the Boers influenced his deep interest in ensuring that they received independence, despite the protests of others within the British government. The results of self-governance for the Transvaal in 1906 and the Orange Free Colony in 1907 did not harm British interests as some had predicted.<sup>184</sup>

Churchill always liked to be in charge. He demonstrated this take-charge attitude throughout his early life and on into his time in South Africa. At a minimum, he insisted on being in control and only did those things, which he thought would benefit his reputation. As he took positions of increased responsibility in the British government, he worked to leave his mark on the organization. This was often done through significant reorganization and streamlining with the intent of becoming more efficient.<sup>185</sup> In the case

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<sup>184</sup>Rose, 68.

<sup>185</sup>Hayward, 50.

of his position as the undersecretary for the Colonial Secretary, a junior position, Churchill took the initiative to advance his ideas for the constitutions for both defeated Boer republics. Churchill's demanding nature, dynamic intellect, keen acumen and drive would not allow himself to subordinate his views to any supervisor or political party. His political career did have its difficulties, some more severe than others; however, when he retired, he was the longest serving member of parliament at over sixty-four years.<sup>186</sup>

Churchill's belief was that upon occupying different governmental positions, he would accomplish larger initiatives instead of smaller less noticeable changes.<sup>187</sup> He felt smaller initiatives essentially maintain the status quo. In this position as an undersecretary, though considered a lower ranking political official, he took it upon himself to become deeply involved in the committee charged with drafting of the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony's constitution.

He worked to reconcile the sentiments of the British government, which wanted the opportunity for equal government representation by the English with the desires of the Boers who wanted independence from Britain. Churchill pressed for self-governance.<sup>188</sup> The constitutional provisions did not slant to British interests, so the Boer elections resulted in the Boers retained control of the government despite initial expectations that the British majority would win the first election. However, the British did not interfere with the election results and the constitution gave Churchill the respect

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<sup>186</sup>J. Enoch Powell, *–Churchill From the Dimension of Time,* 1988, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/biography/redux> (accessed 29 April 2011).

<sup>187</sup>Hayward, 25.

<sup>188</sup>Rose, 68.

of the British and South African leaders. The ultimate personal result for Churchill successfully creating the constitution was the building of his political reputation.

Since Churchill had received humane treatment while a POW, he had a profound respect for the Boers. After drafting the constitutions, he cultivated relationships with Boer government leadership throughout his life into World War II. He learned from the Boers how to reconcile differences compassionately with those who were defeated in order to move forward and build a relationship to mitigate future conflicts.

After the life changing experience in the Boer War, Churchill realized his goal of political office and now looked towards appointment to higher positions within the British government, culminating in his election as Prime Minister in 1940. His leadership qualities of optimism, bravery, candor, compassion combined with a strong intellect and high energy enabled him to have a long and colorful political career. Professionally, Churchill's early career enablers continued to develop. His writing abilities eventually enabled him to become a Nobel laureate in literature. Furthermore, his stable of influential relationships grew to include heads of state across the world, starting with the Boer leadership. His relationship with his father was influential early in his professional life; however, as he grew older it played less of a role. His drive to please his father may have transformed into his continual desire to gain popularity among the British public.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS FOR THE BOER WAR AND CHURCHILL

#### Conclusions

The two most obvious effects of how Churchill's experiences in the Boer War (1899-1902) affected him were to enable his election to Parliament and motivate him to create the constitutions of the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony. Churchill's experience as a POW gave him the recognition and celebrity status that catapulted him at the age of twenty-five into political office. His time as a POW translated into his efforts as the Colonial under Secretary to draft the constitutions for both the Transvaal and Orange Free Colony. This was his first significant administrative position within the British government and the first major administrative project Churchill completed. His high energy, and optimism enabled Churchill to convince his superiors to adopt his versions of the constitutions. Without his connection to the Boers, Churchill would not have focused on creating constitutions that granted independence to the former Boer republics.

Churchill's experience from South Africa did not guarantee his successful election to Parliament in 1900, but he would not have won the election without it. Churchill built the foundation of his success based on his professional abilities of writing, his strong personality, and far-reaching connections. His relationship and memory of his father, Lord Randolph, provided Churchill with the motivation to achieve political office. Consequently, when he went to South Africa, Churchill had developed his life and reputation so thoroughly for a life in politics that upon receiving fame from his experience, he capitalized on it immediately. If he had not continuously worked to

position himself for political office, Churchill's fame would have diminished and his bid for political office would have taken much longer, if ever.

Churchill had a unique desire to achieve significant accomplishments within whatever position he held. His optimism and energy often allowed him to convince his supervisors and the public that his ideas, such as two creative and crucial constitutions affecting former adversaries, were worth completing.

He continued serving in the British government by assuming numerous posts, but he always aspired to rise to the highest level and to become the Prime Minister. All the positions between his first successful election to Parliament and Prime Minister were progressive steps of increasing responsibility towards his next goal. The optimism, resilience, and drive he possessed and developed from the hardship of his imprisonment and escape gave him even more confidence to press forward with his initiatives, but also to accept responsibility when things did not go well.

Churchill performed best in the military when under fire and similarly as a politician during wartime, where he was critical to Britain's success. His military experience, specifically in South Africa, provided an important foundation for his tenure in government. At times in political office, Churchill used his military experience to further the government department he controlled such as when he served as the Colonial under Secretary.

Churchill's early life proved to be a quite an adventure culminating in his election and the writing of two constitutions granting independence for two former adversaries of Britain. While he spoke candidly of his ambitions, Churchill suffered some setbacks such as the two years spent gaining assignment to the Sudan, but to each obstacle, Churchill

applied his pattern of leveraging his contacts, and his excellent writing abilities. Churchill would not have written the constitutions as he did or been elected as quickly as he wanted, without his experience in the Boer War (1899-1902).

### Recommendations

A recommendation is to have available reprinted less fragile editions of Churchill's earlier works such as *From London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* and *A Roving Commission, My Early Life*. Both books were critical to building a profile of Churchill and his experiences for this thesis; however, the books available were about one hundred years old and so fragile that they required significant time and care to read.

### Future Research Possibilities

1. To capture the lessons learned by British forces from the Boer War after the capture of Pretoria and Bloemfontein in June 1900 would help others understand why the war did not end after the fall of both Boer capitols and why the fighting continued. While the British leadership felt that major fighting was over after Pretoria and Bloemfontein, the Boers did not fully surrender and continued to fight for another two years until forced to surrender after attritional and brutal tactics by the British. The British employed concentration camps, scorched earth, block houses on the rail lines, and large mounted military sweeps of the veld. The British could not defeat the will of the last Boer guerillas without an enormous effort.

2. The research of how the early lives of political leaders enabled the achievement of their ambitions. In the case of Winston Churchill, a combination of personal qualities, and extensive family connections with powerful actors gave him access to opportunities

that many others did not have. Perhaps there is be a pattern among great leaders that something common in their early lives led to their initial success and how they continued to succeed or soon failed.

3. How South Africa oriented itself during both World Wars and the effect of conflicted sentiments between the South African government and its people. The South African government supported the Allies while many South Africans were either in favor of neutrality or had stronger ties to the Axis Powers.

4. A counter-insurgency study of the effectiveness of the tactics employed by both sides of the war. The British employed increasingly harsh tactics against the Boers while the Boers guerillas resisted despite the surrender of their governments and the suffering of their civilian population. The use of British counter-insurgency tactics greatly increased after the surrender of the Boer governments.



## GLOSSARY

Boer: South African farmer.

Chancellor of the Exchequer: position on British government cabinet specialized in financial and economic matters.

Kaffir: Boer term used to describe the blacks that worked on their farms, regarded as domestic property, not people.

Plate-layer: term used to describe a railroad worker who repaired any broken rails.

Uitlander: term used by the Boers to describe foreigners.

Veld: open grasslands with some hills.

Victoria Cross: highest military decoration given in the British military or its commonwealths.

Volksraad: Boer legislative body of their government.

## APPENDIX A

### CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS LEADING TO THE BOER WAR (1899-1902)

- 1652 Dutch settle at Cape of Good Hope
- 1795 British expeditionary force arrives at Cape
- 1815 British formally annexes Cape and begins colonization
- 1837 Great Trek migration inland away from government control
- 1840 Boers establish Boer Republic of Natalia known as Natal
- 1843 British annex Natal
- 1848 British annex Orange River Sovereignty known later as Orange Free State
- 1852 Transvaal gains independence from Sand River Convention
- 1854 Orange Free State gains independence under Bloemfontein Convention
- 1867 Diamonds discovered near the city of Kimberly in the Orange Free State
- 1871 British annex Kimberly and the diamond fields to the Cape Colony
- 1877 British annex Transvaal
- 1879 British neutralize native tribal threat to Transvaal
- 1880 Paul Kruger instrumental as the Boer military leader who begins the First Boer War
- 1881 February, Battle of Majuba, the British forces soundly defeated, Major General Colley killed
- April, Convention of Pretoria grants Transvaal independence with limited ties to Britain
- 1886 Gold discovered in the Transvaal
- 1889 Cecil Rhodes establishes the British South Africa Company
- 1890 Cecil Rhodes becomes the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony

- 1896 January, the Jameson Raid key leaders arrested by Boer forces in the Transvaal
- 1897 Sir Alfred Milner arrived in Cape Colony as the Governor and High Commissioner of South Africa (overseeing British holdings in South Africa)
- 1898 Paul Kruger elected to fourth term as Transvaal President
- 1899 9 September, Britain sent ten thousand troops to reinforce the Natal  
22 September, Britain decided to send a fifty thousand man Army Corps to South Africa  
9 October, Kruger issues ultimatum  
11 October, ultimatum expired and war began with Transvaal Boers invading Natal and Cape Colony.  
15 November, Churchill and other British captured at the ambushed armored train  
18 November, Churchill and other POWs arrived in Pretoria  
12 December, Churchill escaped the State Model School prison  
18 December, Churchill made it safely to the British Consul in Delagoa Bay
- 1900 May, Orange Free State annexed to Britain now known as Orange River Colony  
October, British annexed Transvaal
- 1902 Boer forces surrendered on 31 May with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging

## APPENDIX B

### POLITICAL OFFICE

- 1897 Company commander 31st Punjab Infantry Malakand Field Force
- 1900-1904 Conservative Party Member of Parliament (Changed political party to Liberal in 1904)
- 1905-1908 Appointed Colonial under Secretary (focused on negotiating constitutional self-governance for the Boer republics)
- 1908-1910 President for the Board of Trade (focused on labor issues such as a minimum wage)
- 1910-1911 Home Secretary (focused on domestic issues such as prison reform and strike mediation)
- 1911-1915 First Lord of the Admiralty (focused on many initiatives such as the Naval Air Corps, development of tanks, and the failed Dardanelles operation)
- 1915-1916 Lieutenant Colonel, commander of the 6th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers (focused on reconstituting the battalion and then served on the western front of World War I)
- 1917-1919 Minister of Munitions (focused on making a smaller ministry more efficient and increasing munitions production)
- 1919-1920 Secretary of State for Air and War (focused on intervention in Russia and effective demobilization of the country after World War I)
- 1920-1922 Colonial Secretary (focused on reorganization of the British Empire's Middle Eastern holdings saving the government millions of pounds)
- 1924-1929 Chancellor of the Exchequer (focused on income tax reduction and made permanent the Ten Year rule for economic planning)

## APPENDIX C

### BOER HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### The Great Trek

The Great Trek began in February 1837 when the first group of Boer voortrekkers, or pioneers, departed Cape Colony and headed into the veld to restart their lives away from British rule.<sup>189</sup> The Boers felt that the only way to live freely was to move as far away from colonial rule as possible, despite the risks from hostile tribes. They relocated away from Cape Colony to high veld country in the north and northeast, into what became the Natal. Eventually, three Boer republics developed, The Transvaal, The Orange Free State, and The Natal. The new republics consisted of Roman Dutch law, a state church, white male franchise, and the obligation of every man and boy over fifteen to respond with their own horse and provisions to fight a common enemy and the volksraad or legislative body.<sup>190</sup> The Boers viewed military action as a short-term activity, usually local in nature with a limited objective and done out of necessity.<sup>191</sup>

The British government eventually decided to pursue the Boers and gradually annexed their new republics. Based on the potential threat of the new Boer republics, the British annexed the Natal in 1843 and the Orange Free State in 1848. This move by the British to recognize the independence of these republics reduced the British financial and military burden. Since there were no known natural resources for the British to exploit,

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<sup>189</sup>Farwell, 7.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>191</sup>Ian Knight. *Osprey Military Men at Arms 301: The Boer Wars (1) 1836-1898* (London: Osprey, 1996), 8.

they saved money by withdrawing the limited British garrison stationed outside Cape Colony. The British likely viewed responsibility of the Boer republics as an expense they would not bear for a people who gave them such difficulties in governance.

Circumstances changed in 1867 with the discovery of diamonds in the Orange Free State; as a result, the British annexed the diamond fields in 1871 for themselves.<sup>192</sup> There was a diamond rush where foreigners, many from Great Britain came to South Africa seeking their fortunes in the diamond fields, such as Cecil Rhodes, whose role in The Boer War (1899-1902) will be discussed later in the Jameson Raid on page 100. The British outraged the Boers by annexing the diamond fields giving proof to Boer sentiment that the British would never leave them alone especially if there were any potential profit to the British Empire.

### The Annexation of the Transvaal

The Transvaal did not have the same competent leadership as the other two Boer republics and consequently the government went bankrupt. The British in typical fashion dispatched an emissary, Theophilus Shepstone, to investigate the situation in the Transvaal.<sup>193</sup> He decided to annex the Transvaal on behalf of Britain in 1877 based on conditions bordering on anarchy under the current administration and feeling that British annexation would improve order.<sup>194</sup> British annexation benefited the Boers security

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<sup>192</sup>Fremont-Barnes, *Essential Histories: The Boer War 1899-1902*, 14.

<sup>193</sup>H. W. Wilson, *With the Flag to Pretoria A History of the Boer War of 1899-1900* (London: Harmsworth Brothers, Ltd, 1901), 1:9.

<sup>194</sup>*Ibid.*

significantly, the hostile Zulu tribes and Basuto uprising threatened both republics; the British bore the burden of suppressing these tribes through military action.<sup>195</sup>

Two important events occurred to the Transvaal Boers during this time. First, the seemingly invincible British Army lost nine hundred soldiers, almost their entire force, in a single battle with the Zulus armed with assegais or spears. Secondly, after the reduction of the African tribal threats, the new British Prime Minister William Gladstone did not follow through with his promise of independence for the Transvaal.<sup>196</sup> These two developments gave new confidence and resolve to the Boers. The Boers decided that if Africans armed with spears could defeat the British, they too could defeat the British; and they were justified in fighting because the British government had reneged on their pre-election promise of independence for the Transvaal. Lastly, the Boers likely felt that God was on their side with the good fortune of having the British eliminate the Zulu threat without Boer involvement and showing them that the British could be defeated.

#### The First Boer War (1880-1881)

The First Boer War (1880-1881) began when a small battle occurred over a tax dispute between a Boer citizen and the British military enforcing the tax law. The year was 1880 and this mini-battle marked the start of the first Boer War (1880-1881), which lasted until August 1881.<sup>197</sup> The differences between the Boers and British were never

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<sup>195</sup>Ibid.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid.

<sup>197</sup>Donald Featherstone, *Victorian Colonial Warfare Africa* (London: Cassell Books, 1992), 64.

fully resolved and festered until the definitive conclusion of the second Boer War from (1899-1902).

Initially in the conflict, the threat posed by the Boers was dismissed by British leadership as another colonial campaign that would quickly be resolved, however the Boers proved to be a resourceful and deadly opponent. What the Boers lacked in numbers they made up for with superb marksmanship, surprise through mobility, and excellent reconnaissance. The Boers fought in units composed of about two hundred to one thousand members called a Commando, which consisted of locally assembled Boers, usually from the same district. Commandos responded to a call up with their own rifle, ammunition, horse, clothes and a small amount of food.<sup>198</sup> The Boer republics utilized this same conscription based system throughout their existence since The Great Trek.<sup>199</sup>

During the first three engagements of this first Boer War (1880-1881), admittedly smaller battles, the Boers soundly defeated the British. This was the first taste of a colonial enemy that utilized modern rifles combined with effective tactics. After months of being out-maneuvered and out-fought, there were growing indicators in London of

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<sup>198</sup>David Smurthwaite, *The Boer War 1899-1902* (Great Britain: Octopus Publishing Group Ltd., 1999), 29.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid. The country is divided into Landdroshtships. These districts have so many wards; each ward has its Field Cornets, Assistant Field Cornet. These are elected by popular vote, for five years, and get a salary. Each Field Cornet has to keep a register of all Burghers in his District. A yearly list is made up and published in Gov't Gazette. Every name so published is a Burgher of the County. Each district has its commandant, also elected by popular vote, and lately paid a yearly salary. These are all under control of the commandant Gen. also elected by the burghers. In him rest the sole control of all the Boers Army and he resides in the capital of the Republic. The generals are appointed by the commandant Gen., who in this war appoints different officers under them.



negotiating a peace with the rebellious Boers.<sup>200</sup> Before effective deployment of British reinforcements, the commander of British forces, Major General Sir George Colley, had his final disaster at Majuba.

The British culmination point in the first Boer War was a battle known as Majuba named for the hilltop where it occurred. On 26 February 1880, the British force under Major General Colley, while bold in his operation, revealed his lack of situational understanding by deciding to occupy the top of Majuba Hill with 554 men.<sup>201</sup> The resulting battle cost the British force of 554 men 92 dead, including Colley, 134 wounded and 59 prisoners.<sup>202</sup> The Boers killed, captured or wounded over half of the British force. Farwell summarized the defeat at Majuba best:

Majuba, though a small affair, was particularly mortifying for Britain; never before in its long history had British arms suffered such a humiliating defeat: a group of unsoldierly farm boys had completely routed a British force containing elements of the Royal Navy and regulars from some of the most famous regiments in the British Army and a force moreover that was six times larger than that of the Boers and in what ought to have been an impregnable position.<sup>203</sup>

Ultimately, the peace agreement, reached with the Boers granted the Transvaal, —complete self-government, subject to suzerainty of Her Majesty.”<sup>204</sup> Through three Boer victories, the Transvaal swayed the British liberal government to grant the Transvaal its independence with the British government only nominally controlling Transvaal foreign

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<sup>200</sup>Knight, 37.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>203</sup>Farwell, 19.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid.

relations. Queen Victoria cautioned her government leadership that there would be tragic consequences from this —humiliating peace made on the heels of military defeat.”<sup>205</sup>

At the conclusion of the first Boer War in 1881, the relationship between Britain and Boer republics continued to deteriorate, especially when gold was discovered in 1886 about 65 kilometers south of Pretoria.<sup>206</sup> The discovery of gold had three distinctly destabilizing effects on the region. First, the population of the Transvaal shifted dramatically. The new uitlanders, who demanded changes to the politics of the republic, tried to impose their belief system on the Boers, which caused a clash of cultures. The Transvaal government retained power by restricting political representation of the foreigners through a lack of voting rights.<sup>207</sup> By 1897, there were 76,000 foreigners of a total population of 150,000 in the Transvaal.<sup>208</sup>

Secondly, given the Boer’s legitimate fear of losing control of their government, the Transvaal government passed a series of laws to restrict the non-Boer voting rights and tax the gold mines.<sup>209</sup> The taxes on the gold mines increased the Transvaal revenues in a short time period. The third effect of the newfound gold was enabling the Transvaal to purchase large amounts of military hardware.

After the failed Jameson Raid (1895), the Transvaal focused on preparation for war with Britain. A further explanation is provided on the next page. The key result of

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<sup>205</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>206</sup>Fremont-Barnes, 16.

<sup>207</sup>Smurthwaite, 22.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>209</sup>Farwell, 31.

Cecil Rhodes' greed and vast fortune culminated in The Jameson Raid. The intent of the raid was to provide additional forces to a planned revolt by the British expatriates working in the Transvaal in order to cause regime change. He used his resources to advance his political agenda to favor his businesses thus maximizing his profit through a jingoistic vision of expanding the British Empire from Egypt to South Africa. Rhodes' ambition of achieving a unified South Africa under British rule proved to be the catalyst, which pushed the Boers and British towards continued conflict.

Even though there were only roughly 50,000 Boer fighters, there were newly made artillery pieces and over 200,000 rifles imported into the Boer republics from 1895 through 1898.<sup>210</sup> The British rumored that President Kruger of the Transvaal looked at the excess weapons as a resource to arm fellow Afrikaners if there was an uprising across all of South Africa.<sup>211</sup>

Churchill described the Jameson Raid as, ~~as~~ an event which seems to me when I look back over my map of life to be a fountain of ill."<sup>212</sup> At the age of twenty-one, Churchill felt sympathies for some of the guilty raiders since he knew them through family connections and felt the British government unfairly prosecuted them for trying to help oppressed Englishmen in the Transvaal. He also did not agree with the conservative led British government that prosecuted the raiders at the urging of the Liberal minority. Churchill did understand that there would be another confrontation between the British

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<sup>210</sup>Evelyn Cecil, *On the Eve of War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900), 68.

<sup>211</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>212</sup>W. Churchill, *A Roving Commission My Early Life*, 94.

and Transvaal. Ultimately, the British government initiated military involvement in the Boer War, but under the misguided pretense of preventing war.

### The Jameson Raid

By 1895, Cecil Rhodes engineered a situation to put pressure on the Transvaal by making the Transvaal mostly surrounded by British held territory. On the western border of the Transvaal was Buchuanaland Territory and to the north was Rhodesia; however, Rhodes could not control Portuguese East Africa to the east which allowed the Transvaal access to the sea for trade free from British interference. Furthermore, the Portuguese colony would not restrict Boer access to the port on behalf of the British. The presence of surrounding British territories alone could not convince the Transvaal government to maintain favorable relations with the British government. Therefore, Rhodes decided to take action against the Transvaal government, capitalizing on British prospector discontent within the Transvaal.

At the end of 1895, Rhodes unsuccessfully used a proxy force of 500 Rhodesian mounted police to cross into the Transvaal in order to foment an uitlander uprising starting in Johannesburg.<sup>213</sup> The facts surrounding whether Rhodes ordered the force into the Transvaal or if they went without Rhodes ordering them, are unclear. The raiding force had direct connections to Rhodes and so the Boers quickly caught them. Within days, the Boers arrested the force led by Dr. Jameson, a prominent employee of Rhodes’

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<sup>213</sup>Smurthwaite, 23.

South Africa Company.<sup>214</sup> Cecil Rhodes lost his political office and caused great damage to relations between the Cape Colony Dutch and the British government in Cape Colony. This event also strengthened the Transvaal's position in the world. The German Kaiser took the opportunity to congratulate President Kruger on his containment of the raid.<sup>215</sup> Further, based on the Jameson Raid, Kruger had the justification for the arming of South Africa with German arms using some of the vast profits from the Transvaal gold mines.<sup>216</sup>

### Sir Alfred Milner

After Rhodes departure, Sir Alfred Milner took over as Governor of the Cape Colony in 1897.<sup>217</sup> The British government appointed Milner knowing that he would continue to push the Boer republics on their lack of human rights and civil liberties for the uitlanders. Either the Transvaal would give in, or more likely, would ignore Milner and it would lead to a break down in diplomatic relations. Unfortunately, the Milner's superiors in the British government could not effectively control his actions, which triggered The Boer War (1899-1902). Milner's agenda reflected the colonial attitude Britain still held towards the Boer republics.

Milner quickly realized that the memory of the Jameson Raid still resonated across the region. He found out that anti-British sentiment was so strong across the region

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<sup>214</sup>Farwell, 23.

<sup>215</sup>Smurthwaite, 24.

<sup>216</sup>Cecil, 68.

<sup>217</sup>Smurthwaite, 25.

in 1899 that trainloads of munitions and arms were passing through Cape Colony into the Orange Free State.<sup>218</sup> Despite this, Milner continued pressing for favorable voting rights for the uitlanders who, would likely put a British majority in the Boer volksraad if allowed to vote.<sup>219</sup> Milner's antagonistic vision for the Boer republics had British control of all the colonies firmly in his sights, but without having to resort to open war.

On 8 September 1899, the Secretary of State of the Colonies, Sir Joseph Chamberlain, convinced the British Cabinet that dispatching ten thousand British troops to the Natal would prevent war with the Boers.<sup>220</sup> This maneuver combined Milner's knowledge that the British government did not want war with the Transvaal, and his estimation that the Transvaal would not be able to quickly mobilize and overcome the reinforced British forces. British military intelligence assessments at the time were that Boer forces numbered fifty four thousand.<sup>221</sup> Further, the British military mindset assessed that this would just be another colonial war similar in nature to India, Zululand, Egypt or Sudan despite the outcome of the previous Boer War (1880-1881). The Boer governments of the Transvaal and Orange Free State interpreted the reinforcement of the British forces in South Africa as a deliberate threat to their independence.

The Boer War (1899-1902) broke out after President Kruger issued an ultimatum which the British received on 10 October 1899 with two days to respond.<sup>222</sup> The British

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<sup>218</sup>Pakenham, 84.

<sup>219</sup>Farwell, 34.

<sup>220</sup>Pakenham, 90-92.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., 110.

refused the terms of the ultimatum and the Boers quickly went to war overwhelming the ten thousand British reinforcements. The Boer forces strategy centered on rapid movement across the Natal and Cape Colony in order to reach the coast and prevent any British reinforcement of their forces.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>223</sup>Farwell, 57.

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